

ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

Bing, Bang,
Boom!

by
Raymond
Leslie
Goldman





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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXIII

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NUMBER 4

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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXIII

SATURDAY, JULY 31, 1920

NUMBER 4

Bing, Bang, Boom! by Raymond Leslie Goldman.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARRIVAL.

BERTRAM BANCROFT BOOM swung from the Limited to the sun-bathed platform of the station. He dropped his suit-case to the warped, weather-eaten boarding, and as he looked about him, a scarcely audible groan escaped his lips.

His first impression of Selma, the small Arkansas village into which Fate—ably assisted by one Ellis Turner—had so unexpectedly precipitated him, was even less favorable than he had expected; and the weight of despondency that had recently lodged itself in his chest gained added poundage as he surveyed the portals of his new home.

The station was the first object to attract his unwilling gaze. It was a small wooden structure that leaned perilously to starboard, as if it had lunged after each westbound train that thundered past in a vain effort to follow it, and had succeeded only in rearing its left end and sinking its right. Its sometime coat of brilliant yellow

was now faded to a dismal drab, and what paint was left to it by the wind and rain had been converted into blisters by the sun.

Gathered about it, like a brood of chicks about the mother-hen, stood a number of smaller frame buildings in various stages of dilapidation, presumably warehouses of former and better days; and farther on, nearer to the glistening rails, a giant water-tank reared itself on trellised legs.

"A tank-town!" the young man murmured bitterly as his gaze swept across the cheerless panorama and then down the converging road-bed, over which hung thinning festoons of smoke to mark the passage of the train that had paused only long enough to allow him to alight and to eject his trunk from the baggage-car.

It was the latter part of September, but summer still reigned so supreme that its heat was visible. The murky interior of the station promised some relief from the scorching sun, and Bert, who could not decide just what direction to take because it mattered so little which he should choose, gripped his suit-case and stepped through the open door.

A tall and surprisingly thin man, who looked as if he might once have been quite portly, but had been reduced to his present slimness by the melting humidity, was dozing in a corner of the bench that was reserved for waiting passengers.

The impression of erstwhile portliness was, possibly, occasioned by his garments, which were much too large for him, clothing him more after the manner of drapery than of a shirt and trousers. He was smooth-shaven—or, at least, he probably had been so several days before; and his prominent features—the long, hooked nose, the wide, thick-lipped mouth, the deep-set eyes, with their bushy overhanging brows, the rather loose skin of his cheeks—all, somehow, furthered the impression that he had at one time carried thrice his present weight.

At Bert's entrance he opened his eyes, but made no other movement to show that he was aware of the newcomer's presence.

"Hello," said Bert, standing before him. "Are you the station-master?"

Without moving his body, the man looked Bert over from head to foot. His scrutiny was thorough and rather speculative; Bert flushed under it.

"I aim to be," he drawled. "Why?"

"Well," Bert replied sarcastically, nettled by what he considered the insolence of the man's manner and tone, "I thought maybe you were the mayor of this burg; and I'd hate to tell the mayor to get busy and attend to my trunk that's out there on the platform."

"I see," said the station-master thoughtfully. "A person does hafta be kinder keerful thataway. But I ain't the mayor."

Bert grunted. "So I gather from your previous remarks," he said dryly. "What about my trunk?"

"What about it?"

"Yes; what about it!"

"It's your trunk, ain't it?"

"Of course it's my trunk!"

"Well, then," drawled the man seriously, "ef it's your trünk, you must know a durn sight more about it 'n me."

With which statement he turned his head—which was his first muscular effort since Bert had entered—and spat with surprising force across the room.

Bert did not know whether to become angry or to laugh. Fortunately he decided upon the latter course. But the station-master's face remained impassive, and if there was a glint of mirth in his eyes, his drooping lids effectively concealed it.

"Well, there's some logic in that," said Bert. "But as it happens, I don't know much more about it than you do. Carson packed it; and all I know is that it's mine, and that I'd like to have it sent to the hotel. How about *that*?"

"I reckon you'll git it all right. There ain't no butter in it, is there?"

"Butter! Of course not!"

"Well, then," said the man, pausing to expectorate again, "I reckon it won't hurt it to stand there in the sun till Amos comes along."

Bert laughed again. Here, he decided, was a species of humankind the like of whom he had never seen before. He wondered if the entire population were like him. He hoped not. Such humorous boorishness was agreeable only in small doses.

"I'll be much obliged to you if you'll attend to it for me," he said. "Have it sent to the Majestic Hotel."

"I reckon you mean the Palace."

"No; the Majestic. I'll put up at the Majestic."

"I reckon you mean the Palace," the man repeated.

Bert pondered a moment. "Did they change the name to the Palace?"

"Not as I know of. The Palace has been the Palace as long as I kin remember."

"You—you mean there *isn't* any hotel here called the Majestic?" Bert asked fearfully.

"It's closed," responded the other laconically. "Forever, I reckon."

"I mean, how long has that hotel been closed?"

"Oh, not long. Only about seven years!"

"For—the—love—of—Mike!" gasped Bert.

The man raised his brows. "I ain't got a uncommon curiosity, young feller, but it seems to me that you're mighty interested in that old Majestic."

There was, indeed, more than curiosity

in the station-master's eyes. Bert thought that he discerned the glint of suspicion. The words, though, had been uttered quite casually—too casually, it seemed to Bert. He wondered why his manifested interest in the Majestic Hotel should be the stimulant to arouse the station-master from his lethargy.

"Why, I am interested—a little," said Bert dryly. "I own the place."

At his words a small shock passed through the station-master, a scarcely perceptible start of both hand and foot, a frowning of his brow and a narrowing of his eyes. But this unexpected quickening of his energy passed as speedily as it came, and he lapsed once more into an attitude of listlessness.

"You say you jest bought the place?" he inquired slowly.

Bert nodded. "Several days ago—in New York."

"Humph! Bought it from a man named Ellis Turner, I reckon?"

Bert looked at the older man in surprise.

"Why, yes! Do you know him?"

"He lives here," the station-master replied. "Reckon you didn't know much what you was gittin' when you bought it, eh?"

"Why—well, I wasn't quite sure how good the investment was," Bert replied vaguely. "But at least I expected to find a hotel that was in operation. You say Turner lives here in Selma?"

The man nodded. "You seem particularly happy to hear it."

"I am!" cried Bert. "Just how glad I am, though, I won't know till I find out how thoroughly I've been cheated. Where is the Majestic?"

"Last time I see it 'twas on Prospect Hill—if it ain't rotted away by this time."

Bert frowned and bit his lip. The station-master's words did little to increase his confidence in his unfortunate investment!

"How can I get to the Palace Hotel?" he asked suddenly.

"Walk."

"What direction?"

The man slipped his suspenders across his shoulders and rose to his feet. Without

a word he walked to the door and out upon the platform. Bert gripped his suit-case and followed him. At the end of the station, the man stopped and extended an indicative arm.

"Foller straight up this road to the fust street, and then turn to the left. The Palace is on that street."

"Thanks," said Bert, taking a dollar bill from his pocket. "Here. Will you have my trunk sent up for me?"

The man hitched up his trousers until he found the pocket and tucked away the bill.

"B'fore this evenin'," he said, as he turned away.

The walk was long and the sun witheringly hot, and Bert's ill-humor, rekindled by unpleasant reflection, grew more pronounced at every step. He finally reached the street which had been pointed out to him, and turned up it.

He surmised that here was the principal thoroughfare of the village; and if this were so, it promised little for the other avenues of commerce. The roadway was unpaved, and a long drought had covered it with a three-inch layer of tan dust which rose in blinding, choking barrages from beneath the wheels of vehicles and the horses' hoofs.

All of the buildings that lined both sides of the street were of frame, and all had that antipathy for the perpendicular, and the rain-washed, sun-blistered appearance that characterized the railroad-station.

There were few people in sight, and these darted from shade to shade, like tracked rabbits that seek the refuge of shielding bushes.

Bert, squinting against the white glare of sunlight, looked up the street with a feeling of deep melancholy. The more he saw of what was to be his home, the higher mounted his wrath against himself and against Ellis Turner, the man who was responsible for his presence there.

He strode rapidly on, unmindful of the curious glances that were cast after him, pausing, finally, before what the blurry gilt sign proclaimed to be the Palace Hotel. He entered.

The office was as uncompromising in its attitude toward life as the rest of Selma

that Bert had seen. It was squalid, and, moreover, it was practically deserted. He walked to the scarred counter that reclined in one corner of the room and addressed himself to the small, red-faced man who was seated behind it; and a few minutes later he was led up a flight of creaking steps to a large, light room, whose window gave upon the principal thoroughfare.

He had registered as "B. B. Boom—St. Louis." He was not quite sure why he had concealed his true place of residence that way, excepting that it was his first step toward severing the thread of his former existence.

He felt that this was wholly desirable. For twenty-four years he had stood with his father's legs, thought with his father's brain, had been fed with a silver spoon by his father's hand. As "B. B. Boom—St. Louis," he would be born anew. No one who, perchance, might have heard of the wealthy Boom family, of New York, would identify him with Bertram Bancroft Boom, the coddled son and heir of that family. His failures now would never be a reflection upon his father's honored name; his successes would never be attributed to paternal influence. He was at last an individual— independent and wholly responsible personally for whatever he should make of his life. It was Bert's first taste of independence, and it was like wine in his mouth—wine with a generous dash of bitters in it. Never having had to worry about financial matters, he had sown wild oats with a prodigality that was amazing.

After his expulsion from the university for the infraction of certain rules relative to sobriety, considered by the faculty as being essential to the general welfare of the institution, his father had given him twenty thousand dollars and a significant warning that his only chance of being reinstated in the good graces of Mr. Boom, Sr., depended upon the manner in which he handled that small fortune.

He advised practical investment, and gave him a position in his own establishment while he was seeking the safest, wisest, and most lucrative incubator for his golden nest-egg. For a while his conduct had been irreproachable; he had lashed himself to

the mast of righteousness and had stuffed his ears against the siren song of old cronies who caroled of the Broadway trinity—wine, women, and song.

And then, one evening—was it only three days ago? It seemed as many years to Bert—he had broken his bonds and had gone astray. And it was at this most unpropitious time that he had met Ellis Turner.

The meeting took place in a cabaret-restaurant shortly after midnight. It seemed that Turner was an acquaintance of one of the men in Bert's party, and he had accepted an invitation to forsake his own table—for he was alone—and to join the unreasonably happy group at Bert's.

Turner was suave, bland—and sober; Bert had delved frequently enough into the flowing bowl to have become loquacious, trusting—and generous.

Bert awoke the next noontide with a memory that was vague and obscure in dawning—like that of a sleety winter morning—with a check-book stub that showed the expenditure of fifteen thousand dollars, and with a deed that gave him two hundred shares of stock in a hotel that was situated across the continent.

Yes, thought Bert, as he stood before his window and gazed out upon Selma's commercial thoroughfare, he was independent now, indeed. His father had made it very plain to him just how independent he was. He was to return home only when he had made good—at least, to the extent of the squandered fifteen thousand dollars—and until then his father promised to forget the existence of the worthless, profligate son.

"I'm through with you," Mr. Jasper Boom had roared at the conclusion of the parting interview. "You pack up and go to Arkansas or Arizona or wherever you've made your fool investment. I don't intend to open any letters from you, so you'll be wasting your time if you write to me for money. From now on, young man, you'll earn a living for yourself—or you'll starve! Good-by!"

For once in his life, Bert had taken his father's words seriously. But perhaps his sorrow would have been less distressing

and his shame less burning had he heard another statement that Jasper Boom had made that evening, when endeavoring to reconcile Mrs. Boom to the departure of her pampered son to parts unknown.

"You don't have to worry yourself about that boy, Mary! He's twenty-four years old and he's a Boom—and he'll take care of himself. I was tickled to death when I heard he'd bought that worthless hotel, or whatever it is, so that I could kick him out, cut him loose from our apron-strings, and get him away from the influences in this city that kept him from showing the stuff that was in him. When he comes back to you, he's going to be a man, and not a thoughtless kid.

"You mark my words, Mary; he's got the world to fight now, and he'll fight it the way he used to fight on the gridiron at college—and make you marvel how such a lazy kid could work so painfully hard just to win a football game! He's got fight in him, that boy has, and though I haven't the slightest idea what he's going to buck up against, I'll bet my good right arm that he'll win out!"

But Bert, speeding at that time on a westbound train, was unaware of this paternal boast that would have filled his heart to bursting with pride. He felt that he had broken his mother's heart, had shattered his father's faith in him, had been cast out in the deepest disgrace and humiliation.

Well, he thought now, as he stared sightlessly from his window, he would show them that he wasn't all bad! He'd make them as proud of him as they were now ashamed! With only five thousand dollars in his pocket—that sum seemed pitifully small to Bert—and a worthless, abandoned hotel to work with, his task loomed gigantic. But he hadn't begun to fight yet!

The "stuff in him" that Jasper Boom had eulogized was very near to the surface and just about to bubble over into action!

Bert's thoughts now centered upon Turner, the tall, soft-voiced, bland and blond man who had shattered the world about Bert's head. He experienced a grim satisfaction in the knowledge that Turner lived in Selma. He had a little debt to square

with him, and he wanted him near at hand. Until that morning, when he had spoken with the quaint station-master, he had not the least idea where Turner might be found. After he had cashed Bert's check, he had vanished from Bert's life as suddenly as he had entered it.

Bert was rescued from these unpleasant reflections by sudden and unusual signs of activity in the street below. In his abstraction he had heard only subconsciously the deep, vibrant clanging of a bell that was rolling over the village. Several automobiles rattled to a stop before the hotel. Red-letted canvas hid the shabbiness of their exteriors, and the men who occupied them bore hand-signs which they held aloft.

In their wake was a crowd of sunbonnetted women, straw-hatted, shirt-sleeved men, and a surprising number of bareheaded, freckle-faced children. People began to emerge from the shops, and, joining those who were already in the street, formed a ring about the automobiles and their occupants.

Bert, startled by this mushroomlike gathering of citizens, watched the proceedings curiously. He guessed at once that it was a political mass-meeting of a sort. So much he could deduce from the gaudy banners: "Jonas Warren for Sheriff"; "Noah Spigot for Prosecuting Attorney"; "Elect Men Who Will Serve You Best." He recalled now that he had seen similar printed cards in the corners of the shop-windows on his way to the Palace Hotel.

The summoning bell stopped suddenly, its last peal lingering in the air as if loath to be silenced; a hush fell upon the assembly. Every one waited expectantly while the men in the machines, whose faces were shielded from Bert by the signs they carried, whispered a moment among themselves. Then one of the men rose to his feet and faced his audience—a tall, blond man, who smiled confidently down upon the upturned faces, giving an anticipatory clearing to his throat, and slowly rubbing together the palms of his white hands.

At sight of him, Bert's heart leaped, and instinctively he changed his hands to hardened fists. For the face and figure that

was revealed to him, clear-cut and distinct in the white flood of sunlight, was the same as that which had, for three bitter days, persisted in his memory like the after-visions of an ugly dream.

The man was Ellis Turner!

CHAPTER II.

BERT EARNS A NAME.

AT that first moment of recognition, Bert was of a mind to bolt for the door, to rush down-stairs, to confront the man who had swindled him, to—but there his mental plan of action came to an abrupt termination. His inclination was to bring about a physical encounter wherein he would satisfy the cravings of his smoldering rage; but his better sense told him that, though this might be temporarily relieving to his wrathful humor, it could not be permanently satisfactory as an administration of justice.

He paused at the door, whither his first impulse had carried him, and pondered this, hand on knob. Then he turned and walked back to the window.

Turner was speaking. His soft, persuasive voice came clearly to Bert, who stood behind the yellow lace curtains, where he could see and yet not be seen.

"You know quite well, my friends," Turner was saying, "that I would not recommend to you any man or men in whom I had not full confidence. You know that I would not advocate their election, if I did not think that they would serve wisely and well this community I love so dearly. You have always had confidence in me, my friends, and I am proud to say that I have never yet betrayed the confidence of any man."

Bert smiled grimly at this. He wondered absently what Turner would do if he, Bert, should suddenly appear at the window and reveal to Turner a living refutation of that last remark! He wondered what this trusting audience would do if he should volunteer to tell them one story about Turner that they didn't know! He wondered if such a story, coming from such an unexpected source, would not help to defeat the

political aspirants for whose election Turner was now extolling his own virtues, and thereby defeat Turner himself, who, of course, must have some selfish motive in advocating them!

These thoughts, indulged in as he listened to the hated Turner, soon changed from idle musings to eager plannings. He resolved that his debt of unfriendliness should be paid in coin more lasting than a physical thrashing; that he would bear Turner's poisoned chalice to Turner's own lips; that he would plunge Turner's dagger into Turner's own breast.

As long as he remained in Selma he would oppose every measure that Turner advocated; he would fight him tooth and nail to prevent the fulfilment of Turner's every desire. Turner had brought him in disgrace to Selma, and Turner must be the one to suffer most for it!

There was a long porch in front of the Palace Hotel, and the roof of it sloped down several feet below Bert's window. At a moment when Turner's rhetoric was holding the people's attention most fixedly, Bert climbed noiselessly through the window to this roof, sliding down gently to the very edge, where he hovered a moment above the rapt listeners, hidden from them partially by the roof itself and partially by their unseeing interest in the speaker before them.

"My friends," Turner was urging, "when you go to the polls to-morrow, cast your votes for honesty, sincerity, and capability. Those are the three qualifications upon which I have built my own reputation among you, and those are the ones you and I must demand of our public servants. I—"

"Just a minute, Turner!" thundered Bert, with such startling suddenness that a gasp rose off the assembly below him, and every face was upturned to him in wonderment. If one of Aladdin's genii had appeared from a lamp before them, their astonishment could not have been more complete. Turner, too, stared up at him in open-mouthed amazement, his words dying on his lips.

"Boom!" he gasped.

Bert flashed his strong white teeth in a cheerful smile.

"Didn't expect to see me so soon, did

you, Turner? But I'm mighty glad I got here in time to join your nice little party and to tell all these folks *just exactly* what you think of those worthy virtues—honesty and sincerity!"

There was something promisingly portentous in the utterance, and the crowd caught the implication, receiving it with a buzz of excited whisperings.

"Hurrah!" some one shouted. "Now we'll hear something worth while."

"Show 'im up, stranger," cried another. "We'll be glad to hear it."

"You bet we will," added the first voice. "Come down and tell us all about it."

Bert knew that these exclamations were made by opponents to Turner; and the knowledge that he had friends among the murmuring throng gave him added confidence. With a "Look out below!" he swung himself from the roof, remained pendent a moment as he hung from the gutter, and then dropped lightly down into the clearing the crowd had made for him.

Turner was a man of too wide and varied experience to be robbed for long of his poise of bearing, his power of smooth speech, or of his uncanny ability to adjust himself to a situation. His bewilderment, occasioned by Bert's unexpected appearance, was momentary; and by the time Bert had wormed his way through the crowd to the running-board of his machine, he was the suave, smiling, confident man who had for so long led Selma by its ears.

"This young man," he shouted, stilling the assembly with an outturned palm, "this young man wishes to say a few words to you. I am sorry," he continued in a softer voice, "that I cannot properly introduce him to you, for my acquaintance with him has been very brief. I—"

"Let's hear the stranger!"

"Let the young feller do' his own inter-'doocin'!"

Turner, still smiling, stepped back, and Bert, ignoring the tonneau door, vaulted lightly over it into the machine, turning a serious face toward the expectant audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began slowly, "I'm not much of an orator, as you'll soon see, and I can't dress up my state-

ments in the fancy frills of rhetoric possible to Mr. Turner. What I've got to say is going to be snappy and to the point. I arrived at this charming village only a few hours ago, and I suppose it's a bit unusual for a man to jump into politics so soon after his arrival. (Laughter.) But while I was standing at the window of my room up there, I heard Mr. Turner make a few statements that I happen to know to be a bit off color, and I feel it to be my duty as a prospective citizen of this community to put you straight about several things."

He paused and the crowd swayed forward, as crowds will be drawn by the magnet of a promised disclosure. Bert cleared his throat, and continued:

"Turner just told you that he had never betrayed the confidence of any man. He has told you that honesty and sincerity were his strong points. Well, ladies and gentlemen, I'm not going to come right out and say that he didn't tell you the truth when he said that. I'm just going to tell you something, and then I'm going to leave it to you whether he was telling the truth or not.

"Three days ago, Turner sold me two hundred shares of stock in the Majestic Hotel. Do I have to say any more than that? I didn't know until I arrived here this morning that the place had been closed for seven years, and that my fifteen thousand dollars' worth of stock wasn't worth the paper it is printed on. He showed me a picture of the hotel that must have been taken when it was flourishing years ago, and he told me that if it were managed properly, it could prove to be a gold mine. Is that betraying the confidence of any man, ladies and gentlemen? Is that an example of the supreme virtues—honesty and sincerity?

"I'm not a sorehead; I can take a licking and smile about it; but when I see others about to walk into a similar trap, I'm Good Samaritan enough to try to save them. I don't know anything about this Mr. Warren and Mr. Spigot. They may both be the best, most honest, and most faithful men that ever trod the fertile soil of Arkansas. But the very fact that a man like Ellis Turner wants them in office

should be sufficient reason to keep them out of it. That's all. I thank you."

There was no applause or cheers to follow the conclusion of his speech—just a weighty silence. When the missionary tells the pagan that his gods are false, there are no cheers to greet the statement. When a nation hears that its monarch is a traitor, there are no shouts of joy to receive the shocking tidings.

To these simple folks of Selma, Turner was a demigod, a trusted friend, a wise counsellor; a leader to be followed as unquestioningly and as blindly as a flock follows its head sheep. And now that their supreme confidence was shaken by a statement that surely would never have been made had it been utterly false, they were stunned.

Loath as they were to believe, yet they could not completely doubt. If the stranger did not own the Majestic stock, he would not have said that he did; such a falsehood would be too simple of revelation. And if he had, indeed, those worthless shares, he must have been induced by trickery and misrepresentation—even as the young man had stated—to buy them. Turner had swindled him out of fifteen thousand dollars! Turner—their advisor and protector! Turner—their mortal deity!

None knew so well as Turner himself—a master of crowd psychology—the vital effect of Bert's few words. He had foreseen this result, in fact, before Bert had uttered them. But he was too wise a strategist to try to prevent the young stranger from addressing the people. Imagination would construct defamations more virulent than the truth itself; the unspoken word would be more vital than that which was uttered.

Now, by the poisonous silence that followed Bert's words, he stepped forward, unsmiling now, yet sublimely unabashed; his face solemnized by an expression of pained tenderness, as if their momentary mistrust hurt him to the heart.

Bert stepped back to make room for him, and for a single instant their eyes met. No one but Bert saw the silent warning in Turner's gray eyes; no one but Turner saw the light of triumph in Bert's. It was an

instant's conflict of gray eyes: Turner's the gray of cold blade-steel; Bert's, the gray of a stream with the sun dancing on it.

That's moment's exchange of gaze was as potent as a physical encounter; Bert thrilled under it—thrilled with the love of a battle of strength. This man was his first enemy.

"My friends," said Turner in a soft voice that was, nevertheless, full enough to reach every eager ear, "I trust that you will not pass harsh judgment upon me before you have heard what I have to say. I hope that you will not be too easily influenced by this stranger's slurring remarks to censure at once a tried and true friend who has striven so long and so untiringly to serve you in every way. The statements themselves must be weighed against the character of the speaker before you can find out their real worth.

"A small group of men among you, representatives of a clique who have persistently opposed the principles of honor and righteousness for which I stand, prevented me from introducing to you the young slanderer who has just addressed you. I will do so now. I do not know him very well—thank Heaven—but I do know him well enough to let you judge the principles for which *he* stands.

"He is a wastrel, a profligate son of a family that has ostracized him as being unworthy to bear the name it has given him! His behavior has been so revolting to the moral and physical senses of all decent people that *his own father* dares not acknowledge him longer as a son!

"My friends, would you judge me by the statements of such a debauched scapegrace? Would you turn from me to an impudent stranger who has come among you because no decent community would tolerate his presence? •

"It is true, my friends, that I have sold him the stock of the Majestic Hotel. But I did not swindle him! I sold him stock for fifteen thousand dollars that was originally worth *fifty* thousand! The hotel building is there, the grounds—acres of it—are there, there are furniture and furnishings in the building that are just as they

were in the former days of operation. There is no swindle to that! Any misrepresentations that the fellow speaks of were made by his own befuddled brain; for, my friends, *he was dead drunk* when he made the purchase from me! Understand that—*dead drunk*—just as he was every night of his profligate existence!

"I admit," he went on, diminishing his voice from the crescendo to which it had risen, "that it was not quite right to have sold him that stock while he was in so revolting a condition. He might have had the transaction nullified in the courts of his State, if he had so desired. But he didn't dare! He would have been laughed out of town! But if I did so slight a wrong as to give him value for money he would have squandered on drink and excesses, it was because I had *your* interests at heart. Do you know to what use I shall put that money? Let me tell you:

"You all know how long we have rebelled against the condition that made it necessary for us to procure our electricity from Pinebluff. Well, that condition will be removed. With that fifteen thousand dollars, which I shall call yours, and with added capital of my own, I shall bring our own plant right here to Selma! Within three months, we will sever our unpleasant relations with the unscrupulous Consolidated Company of Pinebluff, and you will have a model, modern electrical plant that you may call your own!

"Now—judge me as you will, my friends—but be slow to judge me harshly."

For a moment there was silence as thick as that which followed Bert's address; then someone started to cheer, and soon a shout rose off the crowd like a sudden burst of flame, and handkerchiefs and hats fluttered in the air.

"Hurrah for Ellis Turner!"

"Kick the young scamp out'n town, I say!"

"Three cheers for the power plant!"

"Three cheers for Spigot an' Warren!"

Through the cheering throng a young man elbowed his way to the machine, and stepping on the running-board, frantically waved and shouted for silence. Bert, bewildered by the sudden turn of affairs,

numbed by the knowledge that in his first fight with Turner he had been ignominiously defeated, watched the newcomer through eyes that were blurred with chagrin and burning shame.

"Let's hear Fred Patterson!"

"Say your say, Fred!"

Gradually the cheering and shouting subsided, and when all was quiet once more, the young man on the running-board began to speak. He was a man of about Bert's own age, tall, wiry, with an elasticity of movement that suggested great agility. His eyes were blue, and seemed to twinkle with mirth even when, as now, his face was serious. He wore a blue work-apron that was covered with ink-stains, and his long, slender hands, too, were spotted with the fluid of the printing-press. His yellow, rumpled hair was like flax in the sunshine.

"Listen here," he cried out abruptly. "Are you folks going to let yourselves be double-crossed again? You get me sick, you do! If that man Turner told you that black was white, you'd believe him. He's just got out of a tight place by saying a lot of disgusting lies about that young man who just came here, and by trying to make you think that he's giving you a present of a power plant.

"I don't know anything about this stranger, but I'd take an oath on it that he isn't the sort of fellow Turner would have you believe him to be. You never in your life saw the kind of drunkard and dissipator Turner was talking about that had the clear skin, the bright eye, and the steady hand of that young man. Maybe he was intoxicated when he bought that stock from Turner, but I wouldn't be surprised if Turner was the one who made him get that way! That's what Turner does with you folks. He gets you all intoxicated with words, and then he gets you to do just what he wants you to do.

"As for that power plant—it's a joke. Of course we want our own plant; but we don't want Ellis Turner to own it! We want to own it ourselves. We want it to be bought with the *city's* money, so that the *city* will own it. But the city won't buy it because every man in office from the mayor down is Turner's man—placed in

public office by Turner to do Turner's bidding, just as he wants to put in Warren and Spigot—and Turner wants to own that plant himself!

"Another thing that Turner wants to do now is to try to run this young stranger out of town. Well, he's not going to do it. That's the kind of a man we need in this town—the kind who isn't afraid to walk up to this idol of yours and tell him where he gets off. He wants him run out of town because he's afraid of him. I just looked at the Palace register, and I found out the stranger's name. It's Boom—B. B. Boom. You know what that stands for, don't you? *Bing, Bang, Boom!* He came in with a *bing* and a *bang*, and, despite Turner and his crooked gang, Selma is now going to boom! (Laughter.)

"You better go home now, folks. Dinner's ready, and you've had enough excitement for one morning."

The crowd slowly dispersed, amid much laughter and conversation. Some hurried away to their homes, for the sun was at the meridian, some reentered the shops, some gathered in argumentative groups to discuss the unusual meeting they had just attended.

Bert climbed quickly from the machine in which he was so unwelcome a guest, and, uncomfortably aware of the speculative eyes that were directed toward him, hurried to the refuge of the hotel veranda. As he was about to enter the building, he felt a hand laid on his arm and, turning, saw the young man who had so generously and so ably come to his defense a few moments before.

"My name is Fred Patterson," he said, extending his hand to Bert, "I'm the owner, editor, reporter and printer of Selma's only daily—*The Punch*. I see that you and I have a common cause, and I hope we can work together."

"Thank you," Bert replied, gripping the proffered hand. "I don't have to tell you that I'm grateful to you for speaking for me in my defense. It was an embarrassing situation for me."

"Getting opponents into embarrassing situations is Turner's long suit. If you're intending to fight Turner here, I'd advise

you to go out to the swamps some day and practice fighting snakes. You want to be on your guard every minute that you're in Selma, because there's nothing underhanded that Turner wouldn't do. We don't carry guns in this town, the way they used to do 'way out west; but Turner always has a few new tricks up his sleeve that are just as effective."

"What do you mean?" Bert asked quickly.

Patterson shrugged. "That's it. You never know till they happen. That's why they're effective. Well, I've got to be getting this evening's paper on the presses. Drop in any see me any time, Boom. You can always count on me."

When Bert entered his room, he found the station-master awaiting him with his trunk. He was reclining in a chair drawn up before the window, his feet crossed on the sill, puffing away contentedly at a long, black cigar.

"Hello," greeted Bert. "I see you've kept your promise."

The man rose slowly and nodded. "I allus keep a promise and a threat."

"Let's see," said Bert, wondering why the man had not departed. "I paid you for it, didn't I?"

"You know you did," returned the station-master. "Why not come right out and ask me what I waited here fer?"

"Why—why, did you wish to see me about something?"

"That's better. The man who beats around the bush is liable to git his hand scratched on the brambles. Truth is, I come up here durin' the rumpus outside, an' thought I'd stay to see it all in a reserved seat. The fight was all yours durin' the first few rounds; but Turner walked away with the decision toward the end, I reckon. Suppose you know you made considerable enemies this mornin'?"

"I'm afraid so," Bert responded coolly.

"After you've made enemies, it's a bad time to be gittin' afraid. Best way to beat out Turner now is to make a success out of that there Majestic, eh?"

"If it's not impossible," Bert replied shortly, irritated by the man's persistent questions.

The older man snorted. "Impossible' is a darn good word not to have in your vocabulary. When somethin' looks impossible to you, it may not look the same to somebuddy else. An ostrich sticks his head in the ground and thinks it's impossible fer anybuddy to see him, jest b'cause he can't see nobuddy hisself. But unless we stick our heads in the ground, too, why we kin see the ostrich jest the same. You're gonna stay here in Selma and fight it out with Turner, ain't you?"

"I expect to."

"You ain't gonna holler quits as soon as he starts to git in some dirty work, are you?"

"Say," cried Bert, "what's the idea of all these questions, anyway?"

"The idea of any question is to git a civil answer," said the man, studying Bert. "The only way to git to know a man is to talk with him. Looks don't count fer much, exceptin' to fool you. I've known folks to have said: 'What a purty vine that is. Reckon I'll pick some to take home'—and they have a rash on their hands the rest o' their lives."

"Well, what in the world—"

"I'm through," said the station-master. He walked to the door; then paused, his hand on the knob. "Once there was a smart Aleck lion got caught in a net, and with all his durn smartness, he couldn't move hand nor foot. Along come a mouse he didn't think wu'th spittin' at. Soon's the lion had swallered enough of his pride, he asked the mouse to lend a hand, and the mouse got him out. Ever hear that story?"

"Sure," replied Bert, mystified. "What about it?"

"Nothin'," said the station-master; and departed.

CHAPTER III.

SHADOWS IN THE NIGHT.

SHORTLY after dinner—which was the mid-day meal in Selma—Bert recalled Fred Patterson's invitation, and hurried over to the office of *The Punch*. Before he could follow the young editor's ad-

vice and put himself on guard in the fray into which he had flung himself, he must definitely determine whom he should consider friends and whom enemies; and there was one man whom he was unable to place in either category.

That man was the quaint station-master, with his bizarre apparel and his equally bizarre boorishness, who took such an unusual interest in Bert's affairs, and made statements seemingly so irrelevant and yet carrying the impression of vital importance.

"He's got me going," confessed Bert. "I don't know whether to trust him or to fear him. He's the strangest man I ever met."

Fred laughed. "Oh, you'll get used to him in time. He has a way of mystifying everybody he speaks to. You can talk with him for ten minutes and not understand a word he says to you. But if you go into a corner, after he's gone, and think hard, everything he meant to tell you will slowly unfold itself to you. Everything he says *means* something; he doesn't waste a word."

"I haven't been able to figure out the meaning of what he said to me," said Bert. "I'll have to think about it sometime more, I suppose."

"Well," said Fred slowly, "as long as you're an enemy of Turner's, you can count on David Hodge as a friend. He hates Turner like poison—and with good reason. Turner gave him an awful lot of trouble. Why, to look at him, you wouldn't believe that he was once one of the stoutest men in Selma, would you?"

"No!"

"Absolutely. He was not alone stout, but he was *fat*. He had two chins, and everything else in proportion."

Bert recalled his first impression of the station-master. Somehow, he could picture that gaunt, bony man increased to plumpness.

"What did it?" he asked. "Worry?"

"I suppose so. Lord knows, Turner gave him enough of it. You see, less than ten years ago, he was a prosperous man, a widower who lived with his daughter on a fine farm just west of here. Then, somehow or other, he got in Turner's debt,

and Turner managed to break him. Took away everything he had—everything.

"Added to that, David's daughter, who was the apple of his eye, ran away from home one day; and David's never seen or heard of her to this day. After Turner had made David penniless, he was kind enough to give him a job at the Majestic, working about the hotel as an outside man, shoveling away snow and doing odd jobs like that during the season, and keeping the grounds in order during the summer months. The Majestic was flourishing then."

"What killed it?" asked Bert.

"The anti-gambling law. The prosperity of the Majestic depended wholly on gambling. They used to call it the Monte Carlo of the Middle West in those days. From October to June, people used to come from all over this part of the country and spend their vacations or their week-ends at the Majestic. They used to be a swell crowd of people, too, just as they have now at the good hotels at Hot Springs and those places. But gambling here was the only attraction, and when that stopped, it was all over with the Majestic. But Turner made a pile of money in it while it lasted."

Bert nodded thoughtfully. "Hasn't he made any attempt to revive it?"

Fred shrugged. "How? You can't bring people to a place just because there's a nice hotel there. They want a *reason*. Can you see any reason in Selma?" he added dryly.

"I know one thing," said Bert, snapping shut his jaws. "I'm going to find a *reason*!"

A short time later Bert took his leave and, taking advantage of Fred's offer of the use of his horse and buggy, set out to inspect the Majestic Hotel. The road which he followed in accordance with Fred's directions, was a continuation of Main Street, which, after the single long block of commercial buildings had been left behind, became a street of residences, bordered by spreading maples.

Further on, at the rounding of the bend, it narrowed to a lane, shaded by the interlaced boughs of trees that edged it. Here the air was sweet with the rich scent of

greenery. Unseen birds twittered and chattered and chirped in the dense foliage. Insects droned through the air, some of them so gorgeously colored that Bert would have been reluctant to call them "bugs." Despite the heat of the afternoon, there was that dank coolness of the woodland that no sun, however intense, could quite penetrate.

Presently the road opened into a clearing, and in the center of this shadeless area stood the defunct hotel—a huge white sepulcher marking its own burial-place. The road circled to pass under a dilapidated porte-cochère that jutted from a wide loggia, running the entire length of the building. The top of this porte-cochère formed an uncovered balcony; and on either side there were flights of steps that rose from the driveway to the elevated veranda.

Beyond the square pillars that supported the loggia was a paved promenade, running past lines of windows and several doors that opened into the ground floor of the hotel.

Bert, peering through one of the many broken panes of these windows, saw that the entire floor was one vast room with what little that remained of its furnishings covered with sheets that were gray with dust. He surmised that this had been the casino and that the room had been so denuded by the withdrawal of all the gambling paraphernalia.

After he had tried the several doors leading to this room, and those giving upon the loggia above, and had found them all securely bolted, he effected an entrance into the hotel by removing the glass from an already broken window and climbing over the dust-caked ledge. An hour later he completed his tour of inspection, which was as thorough as it was clothes-soiling; and now, because he had been pleasantly surprised by the appearance of the interior, he was less pessimistic about the task that lay before him.

Of course, the building was in a sorrowful state of neglect; it was practically devoid of paint; there were few windows that were not broken or cracked; dust lay encrusted inches thick over everything; it

was literally crawling with rodents and vermin. But these matters could easily be remedied. The decorations had been at one time more than ordinarily attractive, and could be restored at no prohibitive expense.

There were seventy-five large bedrooms, and a score of other rooms that would appeal to the pleasure seeking vacationist: dining, billiard, card, ball, music—every sort of room that might be desired was there, though, it was true, they had been stripped of their furniture until none but the law itself would call them furnished.

And now he must find a solution to the problem: to waken the Majestic from its death-like sleep. For, in the sudden flood of his optimism, he began to believe that his task was not hopeless; that the Majestic *was* only asleep—like the fabled beauty whose enchanted slumber could be broken only by the kiss of a dauntless prince.

He could already see the Majestic, under his management, re-established in all its pristine glory. He saw it ablaze with lights, the long loggia crowded with laughing, chattering men and women; the orchestra in the ballroom sending out to them its pulse-quickenning music; the line of luxurious automobiles, bearing the license tags of every State in the Union, rolling up to the porte-cochère and away.

He was absorbed in such stimulating thoughts as these as he climbed into his buggy and drove slowly homeward. Once again in the cool stillness of the shady lane, he abandoned himself wholly to them, giving the reins to his horse and reclining in his seat until the greeny canopy above him became the curtain of his dreams.

So wrapped up was he in his eager planings that he did not hear the dust-muffled sound of an approaching vehicle; and not until his horse came to a sudden halt, did he bring his gaze down from above to find himself looking straight into a pair of brown eyes that met his with a flash of intolerant impatience. He straightened himself quickly in his seat, a flush mounting to his face.

The girl was sitting alone in a buggy similar to Bert's, and he was separated

from her by the length of his horse and hers, which were standing nose to nose. For a moment surprise robbed him of his manners, and he stared at her; and in that moment he noted that she was young, breath-takingly pretty—and greatly displeased with the present state of affairs. The roadway at this point of meeting was only wide enough to admit the passage of a single vehicle.

"Why—why, I didn't hear you coming," Bert stammered, finding his voice. "Excuse me."

For a moment the girl made no reply, meeting his gaze with a look of such chilling hauteur that the smile which Bert had managed to summon to his lips faded quickly away.

"I—I was so busy with my thoughts," he added apologetically, wondering at her unusual displeasure. "I'm sorry."

The girl sat very straight and still—and yet gracefully, Bert thought; as unbending in posture as she was in manner. At Bert's words, her full red lips curled a trifle—an expression of contempt that she explained when she said:

"I suppose you were busy thinking how nice it would be if there were a few bar-rooms around here."

Bert flushed again, this time to the very roots of his black hair.

"I suppose you know," he returned, his eyes flashing angrily, "that you are very rude."

The girl shrugged her dainty shoulders. "Toward some persons," she retorted quickly, "rudeness is permissible. I'd like very much to pass," she added.

"So would I," said Bert.

"A short distance behind you the road is widened for the purpose. You should have waited for me."

"There must be a similar place the way you came," he replied. "You might have waited for me."

"I should have," she said coldly, "if I had known that it wasn't a gentleman who was coming toward me."

It is well-nigh impossible for a young man to be wilfully unpleasant toward a girl, however unfriendly her attitude or how inexplicably contemptuous her speech;

particularly, if that girl be as pretty as the one who now faced Bert. And this girl was pretty, Bert decided; deucedly pretty! Surely that look of chilling disdain was foreign to those soft brown eyes; those alluring lips were more used to warming smiles than supercilious sneers! His momentary indignation dropped from him, and he smiled at her.

"I'm sorry you dislike me so cordially before you know me," he said. "I take it that you were present at that meeting this morning, and—"

"I'd like very much to get by," she interrupted. "Will you kindly back up your horse to where the road widens? It isn't very far, and it's impossible to pass here."

"I'll do the best I can," replied Bert, still smiling. "I know my horse has three speeds forward—slow, slower, and slowest—but I'm not sure about reverse."

The girl made no response, nor did she seem to have to make an effort to keep from smiling. She was looking at Bert, but she seemed to see through him and far up the road behind him. Watching her, he was possessed of the rare sensation of being completely invisible.

He took up his reins, pulling back upon them; and finally, after many narrow escapes from running off the road into the gully that edged it, he reached the desired spot and drew over to one side of the road. The girl waited until he came to a stop and then lightly flicked her horse. As she passed him, Bert smiled and nodded, but her gaze was centered on a point that showed ahead between the ears of her trotting horse.

"How she loves me!" grinned Bert, watching her until she disappeared around a bend. "I wonder who the deuce she is."

Fifteen minutes later, when he was hitching his horse to the post before the office of *The Punch*, Fred Patterson came to the doorway to speak to him, and he related to the editor the rather unusual episode.

"I hope every one in Selma won't treat me the same way," he concluded. "I wonder who she was."

"What did she look like?" asked Fred. "Maybe I can tell you."

"Well," Bert replied slowly; "she was a perfect peach, so far as looks went. She had big brown eyes with long lashes, and dark brown hair—almost black—that she wore parted on one side and sort of dipped down on her forehead; and she wore a dark blue whatchacallem, with lace on the collar, and she had a wonderful complexion and a small nose and mouth. Oh, she was awfully pretty!"

Fred laughed, and clapped Bert on the shoulder. "And I suppose she had two arms and a couple of ears. As a describer, Bing Bang, you're not much good. But I believe I know who she is, anyway. If she's as pretty as you say, she must be Ruth Warren. She teaches cooking and domestic science in the high school here."

"I wonder," mused Bert, "why she's got it in for me that way. She seemed to hate me like poison."

Fred laughed again.

"You wonder!" he cried. "Why, she's the older daughter of Jonas Warren, the candidate for sheriff you spoke against this morning!"

Late that night, Bert sat before the window of his darkened room at the Palace Hotel. He was too mentally alert, reliving the events of that day, to be sleepy, and what coolness there was in the sultry night lingered at the window. Selma had sunk to slumber; one by one he had watched the lights of the village blink out into blackness until only one remained: a pale half-moon whose yellowness routed utter darkness from the street, save where the long shadows of the buildings cast misshapen silhouettes across the roadway.

Bert, elbows propped on the window-sill, and his head resting between his palms, was suddenly surprised to see the form of a man emerge from the murky boundaries of one of these shadows, quickening his pace almost to a run as he crossed the brief space of light and until he entered again into the refuge of another shadow, when he walked more slowly once more.

The sight of a person on the street at that hour—it was almost midnight—would have been sufficient to cause Bert some wonderment; but there was about this

pedestrian a stealthiness of manner that filled Bert with immediate suspicion.

He watched him intently as he came up the street, losing sight of him at times when he merged into a shadow, finding him again when he was forced to leave the protecting bank of darkness and to bridge with rapid strides a river of moonlight that flowed across his path.

The man paused, finally, directly opposite Bert's window, before the building that housed the village barber shop. At such proximity to Bert's window, he was visible to the watcher even in the deepest shadow; but, though Bert could ascertain that he was a short, rather rotund man, the face was so inscrutable that Bert was not sure that he could identify him at another time.

Straining his eyes to pierce the gloom, he saw the man cautiously mount the two steps that led to the low porch before the barber shop to pause before a window that gave upon it. Came a muffled, scratching sound; and then the man carefully raised the window, cast a swift glance about him, and climbed over the ledge to disappear within.

Bert, logically concluding that a robbery was being committed, decided to slip on his shoes and trousers and, by making an exit via the porch-roof—as he had done that morning—capture the criminal as he emerged from the barber shop.

He was about to rise to carry his decision into effect, when he was held by the sight of another figure in the street below—a tall, gaunt man who walked with rapid strides in the very tracks of the first man. A short distance to the right of the Palace Hotel, directly in the flood of moonlight, the newcomer stopped to pick up something white and oblong that lay at his feet, glancing at it quickly before he placed it in his pocket and hurried on into the shadows.

"David Hodge!" muttered Bert, following with his eyes every movement of the man. "The station-master!"

He saw that David did not approach the front of the building, as had the first man, but, turning into the narrow space that separated the barber shop from its neighbor, disappeared into its impenetrable

blackness. A few minutes later, the short, stout man climbed out of the window to the porch, gently closed the window behind him, and, still finding out the shadows for his path, hurried down the street as he had come, until distance and darkness swallowed him.

For nearly an hour, Bert kept an alert vigilance at his window, but from the blackness of the passageway, David Hodge did not reappear.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ELECTION, AND AN AFTERMATH.

WHEN Bert opened his eyes to a new day, he was at once sensible of a vague uneasiness; and the worrying questions which had tossed him in wakefulness for so long a time the night before rushed upon him again and brought him to his feet almost at the very instant that he regained consciousness.

The sight of David on the street the night before had, somehow, prevented him from acting in accordance with his inclination; for he had become possessed of a feeling of trust and confidence in the station-master that told him that what action he himself might take would be accomplished equally as well by David.

But why had he not reappeared from the passageway into which he had turned? Had he walked into an ambush laid by the man who had preceded him? As Bert hurriedly drew on his clothes, he chided himself for not having investigated the matter. He dreaded to go down-stairs for fear of learning that some accident had befallen the station-master.

He was agreeably surprised, therefore, upon reaching the lobby, to see David Hodge stretched out in the largest chair the room contained—as if the former days of portliness had left him with the habit of choosing a seat of ample proportions—puffing upon a long, black cheroot, without one of which he was seldom seen.

Bert's "Good morning" to him was filled with a heartiness that would have seemed exceptional to one who did not know Bert's relief at the sight of him. The

station-master returned the greeting with a momentary dropping of the eyelids and a slight inclination of his head.

Bert was on the point of asking David for an explanation of what he had seen from his window; but the station-master's attitude of aloofness did not warrant a confiding of the fact that he shared with him, to a certain extent, the knowledge of the latter's nocturnal adventures. He decided to keep his secret for a while until some explanation offered itself, and substituted, instead:

"Feeling pretty well this morning, Mr. Hodge?"

"Tolerable, thank you. My name's David. Shorter 'n Mr. Hodge, son."

"I'll use it gladly," replied Bert, and added significantly: "My name is Bert."

"Son 'll do. Once had a hoss named Bert, an' it had the heaves. You met Jonas Warren's datter yeste'day, eh?"

Bert raised his brows. Did the man spend his days and nights marking the actions of Selma's entire population?

"How do you know?" he asked.

David chuckled. "A leetle bird told me, as you might say. Mighty fine girl, Ruth is. Didn't seem to take to you, eh?"

"Not particularly. However—"

"Glad to see you're determined to make her think different about you. Mighty fine girl."

Bert sniffed. "I was about to say that, however, it didn't make any difference to me what she thought of me."

"I wasn't judgin' by what you was goin' to say," said David. "I was figurin' on what you was thinkin'. Well, keep after her, son. She's wuth it."

"You're ridiculous!" said Bert. "I haven't given her a second thought. I saw her only once, and—"

"She ain't the kind it takes a feller a year to fall in love with," put in David. "A feller kin like Ruth Warren the fust time he sees her, feel kind o' queer about her the second time, love her the third time—an' be willin' to die for her ever after. You ain't seen her but once; jest wait till the third time."

"H-m! She may be 'mighty fine,' but if she is she didn't act like it."

"Funny thing," drawled David, "how some folks kin dress up their thoughts to look different from what they are. Why, ever since she left you, you been thinkin' what a thoroughbred she acted like under the circumstances. And here you—"

"David," cried Bert, his astonishment making him frank against his will, "I believe that you can read a man's soul!"

"Souls run purty near the same in certain kinds o' folks," David returned slowly. "You kin tell what kind o' sole a shoe's got by lookin' at the uppers, if you're a judge o' leather. 'Most always, on good shoes they's good soles, and on cheap shoes it's t'other way round. However, this ain't a matter o' souls. It's a case o' young blood. Seen Turner since yeste'day?"

"No."

"Hear he's been sayin' that you won't stay here long. Seems that there speech o' yours put a leetle worm in some folks' minds, and he don't care so much fer you."

Bert tossed his head. "Talk is cheap. He brought me here, and I'm here to stay."

"Been givin' any thought to the Majestic? Intendin' to make it go?"

"I'm going to try. I've got to figure out some attraction that will bring guests here."

David rose to his feet, stretched himself, and made for the door.

"Poll's open now. Guess I'll vote and git to work. Y' know, son, attractions is queer critters. Liable ter find 'em in the street or hid in a cupboard or grôwin' on trees. Then agin, you may find 'em hid-in' away in a rickety railroad station."

Bert stared at him, scratching his head.

"Contrary as wimmen, attractions are," said the station-master as he passed out into the sunlight. "Sure enough."

Bert mentally repeated over and over again these strange statements as he slowly ate his breakfast. Fred Patterson had told him that the station-master's every word was pregnant with meaning, but for the life of him he could determine nothing relevant in David Hodge's remarks about attractions.

"Maybe he meant something," he decided finally; "but it would take a lunatic to figure it out."

As he returned to the lobby from the dining-room, a red-headed, befreckled young man jumped from the chair in which he was sitting, and confronted Bert.

"Good morning," he said briskly. "Aren't you Mr. Boom?" And without waiting for a reply: "Name's Gadsby. Represent the Protective Insurance Company. Hear you just bought the Majestic."

Bert nodded.

"Y' see, the former owner, Mr. Turner, always carried full insurance on the building," the young man went on, "but he recently canceled it. Thought maybe you'd like to protect yourself, and—"

"What kind of insurance is it?" Bert asked.

"Fire, theft, and tornado," the other replied, drawing a sheaf of papers from his pocket. "Let me explain our proposition to you."

Fifteen minutes later, when the agent took his leave, Bert had insured his property for fifteen thousand dollars. He put the papers away in his trunk, and thought no more about the matter until, later, he met Fred Patterson in front of Hutchin's barber-shop, which was being utilized as a voting-place. He informed the young editor of the transaction, and Fred nodded his approval.

"Good idea to have it covered," he said. "Did you give your business to old man Sloane?"

"No," Bert replied; "it was a young fellow named Gadsby."

"Red Gadsby? I'm sorry you gave it to him," said Fred. "He's Ellis Turner's nephew."

"Is he?" said Bert in surprise. "He didn't let on. Oh, well, it doesn't amount to enough to matter much. How do you think the election will turn out?"

Fred shrugged. "Spigot and Warren will be reelected, I suppose. But it won't be as much of a sure thing for Turner as it has always been. That speech of yours set some people thinkin', and they aren't going to follow Turner so blindly after

this. One old fellow I was talking to last night, who has always voted for Turner's men, said he was going to vote for Hill and Dyer—our men—this time. If we can only get enough Selma voters to do that, it will put an end to Turner's power in Grant County."

"Why? Is Selma such an important factor in the county?"

"It's the deciding factor," Fred replied. "You see, there are about ninety-five hundred residents in Grant County, and twenty-one hundred of them live here, which is the county seat. That means that there are about eight hundred votes cast in Salem, and about fifteen hundred in the rest of the county. The poll isn't as heavy in the outlying districts as it is here, comparing voters to residents, because many of the farmers don't take the trouble to drive to the nearest town to register and then again to vote, especially at a county election like this.

"Well, usually about nine hundred of those fifteen hundred go against Turner's picked men; but about six-fifty of Selma's eight hundred go for them; so that Turner gets by with a few hundred majority."

"It's usually pretty close, then," said Bert.

"When it's as sure a thing as those figures have shown themselves to be in the past, you can't call it close. What I've been tryin' to do this campaign, through *The Punch*, is to get more of the county farmers to vote this time. We'll see what good it did, to-night."

With the creeping of the evening shadows upon Salem, an eager crowd of men and women began to gather before Hutchin's barber-shop to await the election returns. It was a gala night, and, owing to the infrequency of such nights, it was hailed with a rare enthusiasm.

At eight o'clock, when the returns from outlying districts began to arrive by messengers, the narrow street was thronged with humanity. A thousand voices raised in laughter, shouts, greeting, and argument; the fretful whimpering of sleepy children; the scraping and trampling of shifting feet, sending geysers of eye-scratching dust into the air; the barking

of step-dodging dogs, braving a hundred heels to find the familiar scent of master or mistress; the more distant whinnies of horses, impatient at their tethers.

At intervals this noisy confusion gave way to a hushed stillness, when the man who stood on the steps of the polling-place, in the yellow flood of the porch-ceiling light, read out the returns that were relayed to him from within; then the clamoring broke out anew.

At eight thirty, the result of fifteen hundred and forty-two votes from the county had been made known, with no more districts to be heard from—and one thousand and twenty-five of them had been cast for Hill and Dyer. The final result depended now upon the vote of Selma.

The race was close—closer, even, than usual. Would Warren and Spigot command as many as the needed six hundred and fifty-five of Selma's eight hundred votes? And why had not the local result been announced?

For some inexplicable reason, the counting of those deciding votes within the building was being delayed. As the minutes passed, wondering expectancy subdued the voices of the waiting populace. The announcer on the steps, as perplexed as were the rest, became the cynosure of two thousand inquiring eyes. What was going on behind the drawn shades of the windows and the bolted door?

A rumor, bouncing quickly from lip to lip, told of an altercation that had arisen between Fred Patterson and Ellis Turner, both of whom were members of the election board, jealously guarding the interests of their parties.

"They're havin' it out, hot an' heavy," said one man. "I jest heerd 'em through th' winder when I snuk aroun' th' side way."

Perplexity gave way to impatience; and when one man loudly voiced the thoughts of the crowd—"Hey! What's goin' on in there?"—the cry was taken up on every side until the street quivered with the din of shouting clamor.

At length the door of the poll was opened, letting out a buzz of excited voices from within, and an elderly man emerged,

snapping shut the door behind him—Judge Graham, red-faced, rumple-haired, beaded with perspiration. He held up a hand for silence, which was willingly given him, and then he spoke, mopping his brow the while with a large handkerchief:

"I'm sorry we had to keep you waiting so long, but for a time the result was doubtful; so, of course, no announcement could be made." He paused to consult a slip of paper he held in his hand. "On the first count we found that there had been eight hundred and thirty-four votes cast, of which six hundred and fifty-six were for Mr. Warren and Mr. Spigot, and one hundred and seventy-eight for Mr. Hill and Mr. Dyer. As you know, there were fifteen hundred and forty-two votes returned from the remainder of Grant County, of which Mr. Warren and Mr. Spigot received five hundred and seventeen, and Mr. Hill and Mr. Dyer one thousand and twenty-five.

"After the first count, then, it appeared that the latter candidates had received a total majority of thirty votes. Mr. Turner came forward at this point and declared that sixty-six votes that had been cast at this poll were irregular and should be rejected. He declared that sixty-six names had been irregularly entered upon the poll-book, and that these men should not have been allowed to vote. The irregularities alleged were of two kinds: Either the full names of the voters were not written, initials of Christian names being substituted, or the words 'Grant County' were omitted under the heading 'Place of Residence,' merely the State—Arkansas—being given. To substantiate his claim, he cited the following provision in the code governing elections:

"No registration shall be valid unless it specifies as near as may be the age, occupation, place of birth, and place of residence of the elector, as well as the township or county from whence the elector has removed—in the event of a removal—and the *full name* by which the voter is known."

"Since the Supreme Court has upheld this provision and has held as legal the rejection of votes not in keeping with it, we could not disregard it in this case, and

the sixty-six ballots in question were rejected accordingly.

"Of these sixty-six, twelve had been cast for Mr. Warren and Mr. Spigot, and fifty-four for Mr. Hill and Mr. Dyer. Subtracting these rejected ballots from the total returns, we find that Mr. Warren and Mr. Spigot have received a final total majority of twelve votes, and are elected!"

He stopped, turned abruptly, and disappeared into the polling-place, leaving behind him a silent crowd, floundering in a maze of figures and legal technicalities; not silent for long, though, for of one thing—the vital thing—they were certain: that Warren and Spigot, the men for whom the majority of their number had voted, had been elected.

There was a brief moment of cheering; and then, because the curfew—which was as mandatory as military taps—was profoundly tolling its nine-o'clock warning, the crowd broke up and hastened homeward.

Bert left the porch of the Palace Hotel, from which vantage-point he had witnessed the proceedings, and walked across the rapidly emptying street to meet Fred Patterson, who had just emerged from the barber-shop.

Two men accompanied Fred—he introduced them to Bert as Messrs. Hill and Dyer—and the three of them were in low spirits indeed. Turner had snatched the fruits of victory from their very mouths, and they were left disconsolate.

"Twelve votes!" exclaimed Fred, mopping the perspiration from his flushed face. "And if it hadn't been for those fool mistakes in the registration, we'd have beaten them. Just Turner's luck that his share of the loss was only twelve while we got hit for fifty-four!"

"It seems to me," said Bert, "that it's close enough to warrant a recount."

Fred shook his head. "What's the good? We haven't any kick coming about the outside returns, and as for Selma's poll, we're satisfied that it's all right. It's those sixty-six rejected votes that hits us."

Bert grunted. "You're sure they should have been rejected?"

"Positively," Dyer replied gloomily. "Law's law, and we got to abide by it."

"It's a turn o' the cards," interposed Hill, summoning a wan smile. "Ain't no use cryin' over spilt milk, as they say. We're much obliged to you fer throwin' yer hat in the ring with us, Boom."

"I'm afraid I didn't do much good," replied Bert.

"You didn't?" cried Fred. "Don't you fool yourself! You got us enough extra Selma votes to beat 'em, if fifty-four of our regulars hadn't been thrown out!"

A surrey, drawn by a team of black mares, came down the street, described a semicircle before the erstwhile polling-place, and came to a stop at the curb, a few yards from the spot where Bert and his friends were standing.

The rear seat of the vehicle was empty, and the front seat was occupied by two girls, one of whom Bert recognized a Ruth Warren. Her companion, who was driving, was a fluffy, golden-haired creature who reminded Bert, even in his momentary inspection of her in the dim light, of a dainty goblet, filled to the brimming with bubbling, amber wine.

They were evidently in high spirits, and were laughing in concert—the younger girl in a tinkling crescendo, Ruth more softly and with greater reserve. Neither seemed to notice the four men who stood near by, nor did they acknowledge their polite salutations.

"The Warren girls," whispered Fred. "Suppose they're calling for their dad. The younger sister is named Sara."

Bert learned later that Fred was deeply smitten with the vivacious Sara; but since he had returned from college and established *The Punch*, taking sides so strenuously against Turner's party, among whose number was her father, she had not spoken a word to him.

"Wonder why they don't come out," Bert heard Sara remark; and then, placing her fingers to her laughing lips, she emitted a shrill whistle.

"Sara!" her sister exclaimed reprovingly.

"Silly! What's the difference? That'll fetch them."

As if in answer to her prophecy, the door of the barber-shop opened, and three

men came out, Ellis Turner in the lead. Bert rightly supposed that the other two were Spigot and Warren, the victorious candidates. They hurried to where the carriage stood waiting, and Bert watched them covertly, pretending interest in the conversation of Fred, Hill, and Dyer.

"Oh, daddy, I'm so glad you won!" Sara cried, leaning over to kiss her father. "Congratulations, Mr. Spigot."

Then Turner's voice:

"I told you that you needn't worry, Sara. That young drunkard couldn't beat us out."

Bert flushed and looked at Fred, who, too, had heard the remark, and raised his eyes to Bert's. Bert felt a hot wave of anger pass over him. He believed that Turner had purposely raised his voice so that he might hear. It was more than a statement; it was a taunt.

"We'll have to keep an eye on him," Turner continued in an unguarded voice. "I understand that his record is pretty rotten. I'm really sorry that I'm partly responsible for bringing him among respectable people."

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

"Mr. Turner!"

From the corner of his eye Bert saw Ruth Warren reach out to touch Turner's arm. She did not supplement the single exclamation, but her eyes were eloquent.

"Oh, I know he's standing there, Ruth," Turner replied carelessly. "If he doesn't like it, he shouldn't hear."

Bert wheeled about, and his eyes met those of the two girls which were upon him.

The men were standing with their backs to him, facing the carriage.

"Turner!" he called out, taking a step forward.

Turner slowly faced about.

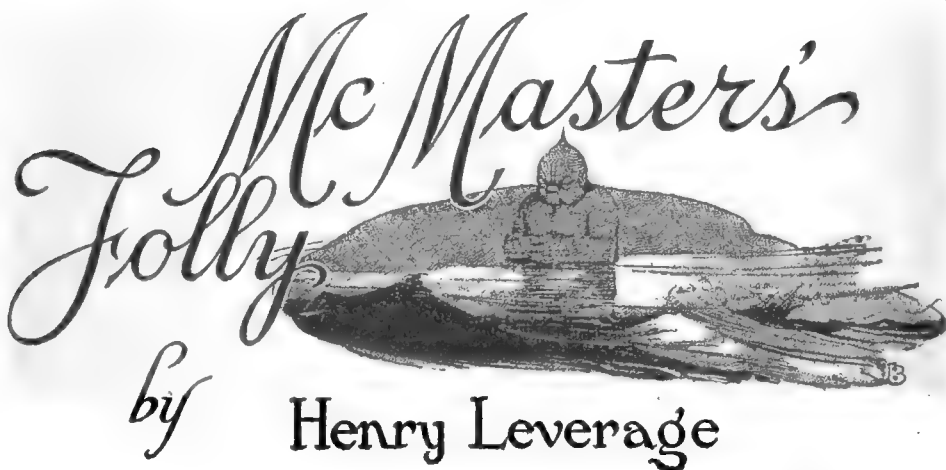
"Did you call me?" he inquired.

"Yes," Bert returned quietly. "Come here a moment, please."

Turner shrugged, and, with a "Pardon me" flung over his shoulder, walked to where Bert was standing.

"Well?" he demanded.

Bert made no reply. With lightning quickness he drew back his hand, and, with a resounding whack, brought down his open palm across Turner's mouth.



IN these days of concrete hulks, fabricated freighters and gingerbread liners, the Borneo seemed an antique from out of a misty past.

She was a ship, full-sparred, graceful, and clean-lined from her tarnished figure-

head to her taffrail. She put in at such ports as Sydney, Longtown, New Caledonia, Pitcairn and Valparaiso.

Her owners were a Scotch firm of South Sea traders who, despite the lure of northern ocean rates, maintained a regular line

of sailing vessels between the island stations.

They picked their skippers with the same care as they used in choosing wives or selecting tutors for their sons. Donald & Donald, located at Valparaiso, cabled, at three shillings a word, to hand Micky McMasters the Borneo's "ticket." Their orders to him, also by cable, were to drive the Borneo to Longtown and there take on cargo.

McMasters dropped anchor at Longtown, and took a turn about the quarter-deck before going ashore to see the ship's agents.

The mate had left the poop and was standing below the seamen who sprawled along the foot-ropes on the Borneo's spars and gathered in the sails. The mate's name was Landyard. He was a tall Yankee.

"See that they're snug!" snapped Micky McMasters when he paused at the quarter-deck rail and looked sharply aloft. "We 'ave a fortnight to spend in this 'arbor."

Red Landyard spat to leeward and roared an order to a green hand who lay over the crossjack yard.

"A little louder," suggested McMasters dryly. "Some o' th' scum we signed on at Torres Strait are a bit 'ard o' 'earing!"

The mate went aloft and the skipper turned and looked at the corrugated iron sheds and pearl-thatched roofs of Longtown. He square-set an unshaven jaw. He thrust a pair of broken fists into the side pockets of his tattered pea-jacket.

The one bright spot on the beach was the Union Jack fluttering from a palm-stem flag-pole. Back of the flag lay a brooding jungle and a misty coast range.

"Spooky-looking place," suggested the Yankee mate when he rowed the little cockney skipper ashore in the ship's dingey.

Micky McMasters had sailed or steamed ships into half the ports of the world. His one ambition was to gather enough English pounds to maintain his wife and children in comfort at Great Grimsby—which is on the River Humber.

"She's a bit spooky," he admitted. "These beach towns look all right from th' deck o' a ship, but they're only fit for th' 'eathen, arfter all."

Micky sprang from the dinghy when it touched the shingled beach, bade Red Landyard seek his own pleasures, and started in search of the sleeping agents and the British Consul.

The agents were Scotch. They passed a square-face of gin, squeezed limes, and promised Mickey to begin loading the cargo at sundown. The consul was mildly interested in Mickey's papers.

"First trip out, eh?" he said passing the papers back. "Well, er, look around. There's nothing much to do here in Longtown. Why not try a jaunt in th' jungle? I'm going inland to-morrow. Bring your mate along."

Micky and Red Landyard accepted the consul's invitation. They straddled island ponies and made a rough passage to a plantation owned by a French settler. Coming back, through no fault of the consul, the two after guards of the Borneo got lost, without a compass to show their bearings.

Red Landyard straightened his long legs, allowed the pony to walk from under him, and squinted first at the sky and then at a misty mountain. He turned and pointed a steady finger through jungle trees. "Th' beach is over there, Micky," he said.

Micky McMasters brushed a fly from his cheek, urged his pony, and started in the direction indicated by the Yankee. He came charging into an open place—a grass-clustered clearing where loomed the thatched roof of a decaying shed.

Red Landyard drew up by the cockney's side. They stared at the shed. "A bloomin' temple," whispered the captain.

Inspection revealed that Micky was partly right. The interior of the shed was given over to a row of weather-beaten idols before which lay wreaths of week-old flowers placed there by native girls.

Micky inspected the idols. He tried to decipher the names carved on the base of each. One resembled a Billiken, another an island ape. All were hideous, and rudely constructed.

"Blym good place to keep away from," commented Micky when he remounted his pony. "I said th' bloomin' island was spooky!"

"Th' South Seas are full of such things, skipper. I guess no one knows who carved them idols."

Micky lashed his pony and galloped through the jungle until he reached the beach. Longtown lay a mile or more to the north. The Borneo floated in the still water with her towering masts reaching into the blue-vaulted sky.

Around her, like cockroaches, darted flat boats and canoes. The cargo was going aboard.

There followed a period of getting the ship ready for sea. Micky and Red Landyard took off their coats, donned wide-brimmed straw hats, and hazed the crew back and forth upon the deck. They gave their orders in sultry tunes, torid oaths and blazing commands.

The standing-gear and running rigging was inspected for faulty splices. A leak was calked in the seams. Dunnage boards and litter went overside. The sails were unfurled and allowed to drape from the spar-varnished yards. Neat patches were sewn. Then came paint.

Red Landyard littered the cook's galley with a mixture taken from the stores. He boiled turpentine and added white lead, sent out by the Scotch traders. He obtained a color never before seen on land or sea—a rich cream inclined to a yellow base.

"Just th' thing to preserve th' planks," he told Micky. "We'll wake 'em up when we reach Valparaiso."

Micky tapped the upper pocket in his shirt. "Liverpool, you mean. 'Th' papers call for Liverpool."

"So," said Red Landyard, and went on directing the painting.

He reached, that afternoon, the bow of the Borneo, where the tarnished figurehead, representing Aphrodite rising from the sea, was bolted on the stem beneath the bowsprit. One arm, a leg and half the lady's side was missing. A careless native had smashed the figure with the cap of a lugger's mast.

McMasters went forward when the mate called to him. Red Landyard sat swinging in a boatswain's chair which was lashed to a pin-rail on the fore-peak.

"She's a mighty scrawny mermaid for a first-class windjammer," commented the Yankee when he pointed a brush at the figurehead. "Any way we can fix her up, skipper?"

"We'll 'ave Chips make a new one!"

Red Landyard chewed reflectively. "Chips," he said, "is a deep-sea fraud! He couldn't make a work of art. This gadget comes under the head of art, skipper."

"Blym hif it don't!" admitted Micky, leaning over the rail. "She's our mascot!"

"She looks like a half-breed girl I saw in Singapore when a wild Lascar got done carvin' her up, skipper."

Micky rubbed the bristle on his jaw. He swung a baleful eye toward the grinning crew. His glance took in the cool green of the palms back of the pearl-thatched roofs of Longtown.

"Red?"

"Yes, skipper."

"Mr. Landyard, take a boat, two men, go ashore to-night, an' visit that shed we saw in th' interior."

"Th' heathen temple?"

"Th' same!"

"What for?"

"Bring out that Billiken! Fetch aboard th' luckiest idol you can capture. Don't let th' natives see you. We'll rig a figure-head that 'll be th' talk o' Birkenhead when we get to th' Mersey an' Liverpool."

The Yankee mate lifted himself, laid his brush on the rail, and sprang to the little skipper's side.

"There's bad luck in them things, some time," said he.

"I don't believe in bad luck!"

The Yankee shifted a chew from one leatherlike cheek to the other. He ranged a calculating eye over the half-garbed crew.

"To-night, then, skipper. I'll fetch a new figurehead."

Micky went ashore at sundown, checked his papers with the agents, gave a receipt for the cargo, visited the consul, and came to the ship slightly hilarious from many drinks of trade gin and limes.

He found Red Landyard perched upon the bowsprit. The Yankee swung a ship's mallet, drew back his long arms, and

swung again. He drove home wooden pegs that were fitted with expanding wedges on their ends.

The little skipper staggered over the deck, climbed to the forepeak, and looked over-side. Aphrodite rising from the waves, had been cast loose where she sank in seven fathoms of water. In her place leered the ugliest of the temple idols—a gargoyle with a perpetual grin.

“A touch of paint,” said Red Landyard. “A bit of gold leaf on th’ cheeks, an’ we’ve got a figurehead.”

Micky steadied his rocking legs. He whispered to the mate:

“There’s a name on th’ bottom of that idol. Don’t I see some lettering?”

“Yes, skipper. It’s in an unknown language—nobody knows anything about. Let it go!”

Micky rolled aft, turned in his bunk, and slept for half a watch. He came on deck at dawn. A southerly trade-wind was slowing.

“Cat th’ anchor, Mr. Landyard,” he said to the mate. “Set everything but th’ royals an’ flyin’ jib. We’re going hout before th’ eathen see their bloomin’ idol!”

The Borneo left the open harbor of Longtown and took the trade-wind over her starboard quarter. It was her best point of sailing. She logged eight knots. Micky mildly suggested to his mate certain things which occurred to him.

“Unbatten th’ fore hatch, Red. Get th’ watch at work an’ lighten ’er a little more aft. See, she yaws a bit. She’s too far hout in the bow. An’, Red,” added Micky when the mate turned to leave the quarter-deck, “Red, you might set th’ royals on fore an’ main.”

Micky was never a bucko skipper. He allowed his crew to come aft whenever they wanted to. He visited the forecastle, and would, at times, sit on a bunk and chin with a seaman. He held that the way of the sea was changing and that many a good man might be before the mast.

Red Landyard, the Yankee, was Micky’s mouthpiece. The mate nursed few illusions. He personally picked the additions to the crew who came aboard at Torres Strait. Among them were a few shell-

backs—world wanderers—who believed that the ocean held its mysteries.

One of these men drew the mate out of ear-shot of the others.

“Speakin’ in general, Mr. Landyard,” he said, “wouldn’t it be just as well for all hands if you heaved that figgerhead overboard? I’ve sailed on ships, man an’ boy, going now thirty years. I never saw no luck in an idol. We’re bound to run foul of somethin’.”

The mate laughed and clapped the old salt on the back.

“Skipper’s orders,” said he. “I’m not superstitious—I rather have thirteen dollars any day than twelve. McMasters don’t believe in those things. This is a good ship, well-found, fast as a witch, and we’re heading for th’ Horn as if all th’ girls in Liverpool were pullin’ th’ strings.”

The old salt’s name was Dipford. He shook his gray head and went among the crew.

Red Landyard inspected the fore-hold, ordered the fore-hatch battened, saw that a tarpaulin was lashed to the deck-bolts, and hurried aft.

“Some of th’ crew are worried about that idol,” he told Micky. “Old Dipford says it’ll bring no good luck!”

Micky rubbed the bristles on his chin and shot a quick glance forward.

“What th’ bleedin’ more luck do we want than this?” he exclaimed. “A sou’-west trade-wind, a clean ship, an’ an ocean of sea room.”

Red Landyard looked at the bulging sails with a certain pride. He strode to the wheel-house and stared into the binnacle. “Hold her steady,” he said, and went back to the skipper’s side.

The Borneo surged on. A sparkle ran across the domelike sea. The trade-wind was laden with soft spices and fragrant odors. Each strand of rigging hummed its own note.

The balm of clean living came to the two seamen on the ship’s quarter-deck. They lifted their chins and gulped the breeze.

“She’s carryin’ th’ mail!” exclaimed Micky. “Who talks of bad luck?”

“Some of them would find fault with Heaven. I’ll tell th’ cook to double th’

ration of plum-duff. We got raisins enough. Feed a crew an' they forget their superstitions. An empty stomach brings up a lot of queer thoughts."

Micky nodded. He went below and made some entries in his log. He got out his sextant-box and climbed back to the deck. Bracing his feet, he started taking an observation. A slight haze lay over the northern horizon. He lowered the sextant and squinted his gray-thatched eyes.

"Take a look at the barometer," he told the mate. "That fog wasn't there a bell ago."

Red Landyard glided to the starboard steps leading alongside the wheel-house. He stared at the barometer on the wall of the after-house.

"Glass going down!" he called to the skipper. "She was goin' up an' now she's down to twenty-five, fifty."

"What?" screamed Micky.

"Twenty-nine, fifty!" corrected the mate.

The little skipper leaped for the quarter-deck rail. He leaned over and shouted his own orders:

"Both watches on deck! Quick now! Take th' sail off 'er! Clew up everything!

"Get forward!" he added to the mate. "There's a hurricane coming!"

Red Landyard went forward. Micky slid for the wheel-house window. "Put 'er down! All the way down! You've got too much lee!"

The wheelman twirled the spokes until the wheel-rope strained. Shuffling feet sounded on the Borneo's planks. The watch on deck began taking the sail off of the ship, as Micky had ordered. It was no small task.

The balmy southern trade died to a calm. The ship's bow swung toward the north. "Steady!" cried Micky. "'Old 'er there, till we see wot's coming!"

Red Landyard, on the foredeck, saw the first menacing claw of the wind. A curdy line dragged across the placid sea. Back of the line was a darker commotion. The sun, almost at zenith, grew pale. A haze dropped from nowhere and blotted out the northern heavens.

Shrieking like a thing that had gone

wild with pain, there fell upon the Borneo a monstrous deluge of wind and wave and foam. One second the ship was towering and stately. The next a hand seemed to reach, grasp her keel, and firmly press her over.

Canvas, dangling a moment before from the yards, was whipped against the masts, rent, torn and carried to leeward. Rigging—rope ends, blocks and the cross-jack yard—came tumbling around Micky's head.

He sprang for the weather shrouds, hooked his right leg over a ratline, and held on for his life. There was no chance to shout orders. The ship staggered, righted sullenly, and reeled with her sails being plucked from her like feathers from a white chicken.

Fortunately, the crew had started descending to the deck before the worst of the blow reached the Borneo. No man was lost. They climbed the weather rail, and, like Micky, grasped the stanchest of the standing-rigging.

The maintopmast whipped, snapped the backstays like packthread, and fell to leeward. Yards snarled with cross-trees and crashed downward to the deck. A yellowish hue swirled about the stricken ship. The yellow changed to green and the green to an unearthly purple.

Wind roared, lifted the sea, scooped waves and hammered the staunch weather side of the Borneo. The bow ran off from the gale. Micky cupped his hands and shrieked:

"Belay that foretopmast staysail sheet! Hei, you forrard! D'ye 'ear me?"

Red Landyard and two of the crew climbed over the wreckage on the forecandle deck and managed to sheet partly home the flapping staysail. Micky ducked a lipping comber and turned to the wheelman.

"Another man aft!" he shouted above the roar of the hurricane. "We've got to keep 'er in th' wind!"

This course of sailing, when the Borneo righted, became difficult enough. Red Landyard and the crew managed to set two headsails and spread a jury rig from the wreck of the foresail. They cleared the forecandle deck and threw some of the spars overside.

Limping like a wounded bird with a dragging pinion, the ship headed into the north-easter which gradually swung from the east. Gust followed gust. The night brought other troubles to Micky and the weary crew. A leak sprang in the seams. The mate sounded the forward pump and set three hands clanking the handles.

He came aft and climbed to the quarter-deck. The ship's list to leeward was all of fifteen degrees. Micky still held his position in the mizzen weather shrouds. The little skipper's eyes were baleful.

"It couldn't be helped!" said Red Landyard. "She came on us very unexpected, skipper."

Micky had worn his anxious soul out estimating the damage done by the storm. "Vast with that talk!" he snapped. "What d'ye make of th' sky to windward?"

"Looks like more wind," said the mate unfeelingly.

"There cawn't be more!"

"Oh, yes, there can, skipper! This hurricane can become a simoon an' th' simoon change into a tornado. We're lucky to have any spars left."

Micky gulped and thought of the thrifty Scotch owners.

"I was trusted," he said, "and now look at th' ship!"

Red Landyard had a Yankee's buoyancy. "She'll weather it!" he declared. "All that's really gone is th' maintopmast an' a few spars. We can put in Sandy Point for refitting."

"Hif we ever get to Sandy Point! We ain't makin' any 'eadway."

An observation taken the next day at noon, when the sun appeared for a few seconds, attested to Micky's statement. The Borneo was being driven back toward Longtown.

Red Landyard, taking advantage of a lessening gale, had the deck cleared and the broken rigging spliced. He got out old canvas and set the crew to work. The pump was unshipped when the well sounded dry.

A day passed with the Borneo making slight headway toward the south. A second day allowed Micky to run down some of his latitude. Storm sails were set on the main and mizzen. The ship, close-hauled, ran

across the gale, dipped her lee rails and righted sullenly.

A week of head-wind sailing brought the clipper within the zone of Cape Horn storms. The easterly gale died and was succeeded by a southern hurricane that carried teeth of ice. Micky stared south-easterly, where he wanted to go, and shook his broken fist.

"She's perverse!" admitted Red Landyard. "I never saw wind with so much meanness."

The little skipper's pea-jacket was sheathed with sleet. His chin bristled through a glazed coating. The ship took the long slushy rollers, ran off the wind, and came back to her course sluggishly. There was no life in her.

"Cawn't you suggest something?" Micky asked the mate.

"Sure," said Red Landyard. "Do what the crew suggest, if you want to get around the Horn. Chop away that idol!"

"Bly me hif I will!" snapped Micky. "I ain't superstitious."

"Old Dipford has th' crew all worked up about that figurehead I brought from th' jungle temple."

"It's a billiken! It's good luck!"

The Yankee understood the little Cockney skipper. He knew there was no changing Micky's mind. "All right," he drawled. "I just mentioned it, you know."

Micky leaped a foot or more from the icy deck. He brought his clenched fists down on the quarter-deck rail. He faced the biting head wind and snapped defiantly.

"I hordered that idol! I'm responsible! Th' hidea of a wooden image 'avin' anything to do with th' weather! Th' hidea!"

"It is a queer idea, skipper. I'll tell th' crew that th' first man who lays hands on that image, goes overboard."

Micky was satisfied. He did not believe in any of the superstitions common to seamen. He had found bolts in hollow spars, iron near the binnacle, sick dogs that were taken for ghosts, and the other things that might set a ship's crew talking among themselves.

"We'll make th' Horn!" he promised. "Ain't I been around ten times!"

Red Landyard came aft two days later and rubbed a frosted finger along his blue nose. "What was th' longitude," he asked Micky, who had taken a fleeting, and somewhat unsatisfactory observation when the sun showed a cold eye through the wind-driven clouds.

Micky balanced himself and glared at the icy rigging.

"We're where we were," was all he said.

Red Landyard was forced to shorten storm sails that same watch. He ordered the crew aloft with kettles of hot water to thaw the blocks. He personally cleared reef-points with a belaying-pin.

Coming down to the quarter-deck he saw Micky braced against a deluge of ice particles and the tops of waves which the steady gale whipped from the sea.

"Still blowin'," he said. "It's freshening some. It's been nineteen days now an' we haven't made a knot to th' east."

Micky acted like a Mother Cary chicken wheeling to attack a herring. "I'll 'ammer you—you red bloater, you!" The little skipper slipped on the deck and would have fallen if the mate had not reached out a steady arm.

"Easy," suggested the tall Yankee. "I don't blame you, skipper. You're anxious to get home to your wife and kids."

"I'll do it on this course!"

Red Landyard suggested something concerning the Flying Dutchman. The big mate looked the sea over with a shrewd eye. All he saw was slate-gray clouds, mountainous waves, and the tossing jib-boom of the clipper ship describing a slow circle—like a drunkard's finger.

"We're not even off the Horn," he left as a parting shot to the fuming skipper. "Better unship that idol."

Micky hung on the same course over the night. He took a most careful observation of a fleecy moon. He checked and rechecked his figures. He came on deck at daybreak, gave the order to put the wheel down and stand by lee and weather braces.

"I'll try th' other tack," he told the mate. "It'll put us up th' Coast of Chili."

"Where we don't want to go."

"Get forrard!" shouted Micky. "Slack-en sheets. I'm comin' around!"

The Borneo ran into the gale, hung in irons a minute, then came about with her braces and yards clattering and her storm sails fluttering.

The new course was in the general direction of Easter Island. Red Landyard studied the compass and shifted a chew before he spoke to the skipper.

"Looks as if th' wind was veering an' heading us each time. There's something queer about this ocean!"

Micky took a short turn around the icy quarter-deck. He drew his head into the collar of his ancient pea-jacket and snapped for all the world like a turtle:

"It'll be queerer if you don't get forrard an' roust out all th' watch on deck. Some of them are slackin', sir!"

Red Landyard waited, dodged a fierce stab from the little skipper's eyes, avoided a cold blue comber, and went off the poop. He got all of the watch out of the warm fore-castle. Old Dipford grasped the mate by the arm and led him to the fore-peak.

"Look over," said the salt. "Look at that figgerhead—a grinnin' there. D'ye wonder at our luck?"

Skipper says that's a good luck idol. A billiken!

"Where's been th' luck?"

Red was forced to admit that he had not seen any. "What do the rest of the crew think?" he queried.

"They think a plenty!"

Angry growls assented to this statement. The mate quieted the crew by promising that he would speak to the old man concerning the figurehead. He took his time and waited until Micky had dined heavily on salt beef and plum-duff.

"I was speakin' to Dipford, skipper. He says that the crew are going to do something desperate. They are afraid of short rations and scurvy."

Micky stared forward. "What did they say about our idol, Red?"

"They can see no luck in it."

"It's a bloomin' block o' wood carved in th' image of some forgotten god. I've seen 'em in th' Carolines an' in Samatra."

"All the more reason, then, for heavin' it overboard. I'll cut it away if you give th' word. It worries th' crew."

Micky had the stubbornness of his own conviction. He rubbed his bristling jaw and flecked away a piece of ice. He looked at the heaving sea and the straining canvas.

The gale, which had lasted for over three weeks, had increased in force, if anything. The Borneo was laboring in a cross current and making scant progress on the new tack.

"We'll go about," said Mickey. "I don't like th' looks of these clouds to windward."

The old course proved no safer sailing. A mountain of bitter-tasting brine came over the forepeak, dashed against the break of the quarter-deck, and cascaded upon the little skipper who ducked too late. He emerged and was blown against the wheel-house.

A storm sail, made from No. 1 flax canvas, carried away like a puff from a three-inch gun.

Through a bitter week Micky attempted to round the Horn. He went as far south as the ice. A southeasterly gale hurled him westward. He attempted to reach the coast of Chili in the vicinity of Chiloe Island. A norther blew the Borneo south.

There was no denying the insistent perverseness of the gale. It whimpered upon the clipper ship like a pack of enraged wolves. It snarled and snapped. It tore away more canvas and started the seams leaking. Reluctantly Micky gave an unexpected order.

"Put th' wheel up! If we cawn't go 'round Cape 'Orn we'll go 'round Cape o' Good 'Ope!"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Red Landyard through chattering teeth. "Th' Cape of Good Hope is seven thousand miles away!"

"More than that, but we're goin' there!"

The Borneo, dripping ice water from her grotesque figurehead to her broken taff-rail, wore around, took the seas over the poop and staggered before the wind. The storm canvas was unreefed. The crew braced the frozen yards. The staysail sheets were loosened.

Dipping beneath the long snow-covered waves of the Horn region, the clipper regained some of her former elasticity. She rode higher, and as Red Landyard remarked, "a bit dryer and warmer."

"'Ow about th' bloomin' figger'ead now?" Micky shouted on the second week after wearing around and taking the gale over the stern.

"It's still there," said Red Landyard.

"But th' gale is with hus! We're makin' grand time."

"Nowhere!"

Micky breathed on his frosted fingers. It charmed his heart to feel the surge and carry of the Borneo. She was moving through the heavy seas at seven or eight knots every hour. It would take a month or more to reach Cape of Good Hope, but the progress seemed far more certain than bucking the head winds of the Horn.

The little skipper clicked his frosted eyelashes and blinked at the mate. "Seems th' gale is easin' off a bit," he remarked. "Wouldn't wonder we 'ad grand weather all th' way to Table Bay."

"You better ditch that idol! It's brought no good luck to this ship."

"I'll 'ang hon to th' wooden image to th' end. I'll show that scum forrard there is no such thing as superstition."

"There is such a thing as superstition!"

"Well, it don't work with me! See, th' gale is subsidin', jus' as I expected."

The easterly hurricane died to a steady breeze. Red Landyard set the royals and the flying-jib. He had the cook and an old navy boatswain stitch new canvas, taken from the ship's stores.

A day came when Micky pointed north over the starboard rail.

"Longitude of Longtown," he told the Yankee. "We're going sou' o' where we started."

A few watches passed with steady winds from the east. Then came a great and brooding calm. The ship rolled, turned, and lay in a heaving sea without a breeze to hold her headway. The idle sails flapped against the masts.

The sun hung at the end of a yard-arm like a bronze shield of hate. The pitch started running in the deck seams.

The crew walked the deck and shook their fists at McMasters. A week passed in idleness. Then, and like a clap of tropical thunder, the Borneo was struck by the grandfather of all the gales in the world.

It was a green typhoon that hurtled down on the becalmed and simmering ship. No man of all the crew marked its coming. They remained to witness what wild winds can do.

Stripped of her main and mizzen masts, and with the foremast sprung, the Borneo was lifted, driven and tossed northward before the teeth of a hot gale that became increasingly hostile.

Micky and Red Landyard hung over the spokes of the almost useless wheel, and attempted to hold the ship's bow before the wind. A patch of sail, not much larger than a handkerchief, was drawing them on.

Ahead lay purple waters. Astern showed towering seas and a livid sky.

Wearily from three watches at the helm, Micky remarked to his silent mate:

"What's th' use. This ocean is too bloomin' much for me."

"You've got no ship—above th' deck. Th' crew are snug in th' fo'c's'le. They refuse to come out."

Micky's eyes flashed, then closed in pain. He squinted through the wheel-house windows. The long planks of the Borneo were wind and wave swept. A Niagara of foaming water escaped through a score of places in the shattered rails.

"We're 'eadin' for Longtown," he said. "'Eadin' right back with a jury rig."

"All th' winds blow that way. We might as well go."

The misty mountains of the island, the surf-curdled beach, the whipping stems of the palm trees in the jungle, rose before the shattered jib-boom of the clipper. Micky intended trying for the harbor entrance.

He braced himself and lifted the wheel, a spoke or two. The stricken ship refused to answer her helm. She stubbornly headed for a lee shore where the surf was the wildest.

"Keep her off!" cried Red Landyard.

"I cawn't!" said Micky. "Th' bloody 'ooker's bewitched."

The mate grasped the wheel-spokes. He let go and leaned over.

"Tiller rope's carried away!" he exclaimed. "She has no helm!"

A moment's pause was followed by a lifting of the derelict's bow. The stump of

the jib-boom steadied. A rush of mountainous seas, wind-driven, pooped the Borneo.

She went forward, scraped her keel, staggered, swung, and crashed into a sandy cove where the waves pounded violently.

The drenched crew swarmed from the fore-castle and went overside like gray rats. They looked back when they had drawn their legs from the sucking undertow. Micky and Red Landyard climbed to the pounding fore-peak, dived, and came paddling up the stream that led into the inlet.

They stood, almost naked, and surveyed the wreck. The Yankee shook his fist toward the grinning figurehead.

A sudden calm came upon the waters. The bending palms straightened. The sea began to go down as the southern gale died to a faint breeze laden with spicy odors and Eastern perfumes.

Micky drew Red Landyard through the jungle and toward the British Consul's residence at Longtown.

"Th' Scotch agents can go 'ang!" he declared. "They can 'ave th' ship an' my 'ticket.' I want a passage 'ome in a steamer. I'll wait till one comes—hiff hit's ten years. I'm done with windjammers an' clipper ships."

The Yankee mate followed the little cockney. They left the jungle and went along the pounded sand of the beach. The Union Jack was flying from the flag-pole in front of the Consul's residence. The consul sat and watched the two seamen climb the steps and roll to his side.

"I saw you come ashore," he said. "A beastly wind, wasn't it. Thought I'd lose my new roof."

"Damn you an' your roof!" snapped Micky. "Hi want a passage to England. So does my mate."

"I can fix you out—in a week or so. The Star of Asia will be due then."

Micky sat down in a rattan chair and mopped his brow with a tattered sleeve. He eyed Red Landyard. "All right!" he said. "Fix us out! I'm done with th' sea."

The consul clapped his hands. A native servant brought a square-face of gin and three glasses. Around the glasses were

limes and powdered sugar. The consul mixed the drinks.

"Here's how!" he said, lifting a glass. "Sorry you lost the Borneo. You didn't get very far."

Micky gulped his gin raw. He reached and half filled a second glass. He poured this drink down his throat, and said:

"We 'ad 'orrible weather!"

"It was calm here, except last night and to-day. I thought something was coming. The natives have been very restless. Somebody stole one of their idols."

Micky looked at Red Landyard. The Yankee mate covered his mouth with a freckled hand.

"Stole an idol?" asked Micky, innocently.

"Yes, one of their favorite gods. It disappeared about the time you left."

The consul waved his hand toward the jungle. "Beastly thing to do," he said. "Some interior tribe must have carried it away. Our natives describe it as a wooden image with the name 'Opōtikipe' carved in the base."

"That's it," thought Micky.

"They have a number of very powerful gods," continued the consul. "They have a god to rain and a god to sickness and—"

"What does Opotikipe stand for?" queried the little skipper.

The consul reached for the gin bottle. He said:

"Opotikipe was their god of winds and storms."



EVE AND THE MODERN DUB

BY GEORGE MAGRUDER BATTEY, JR.

WHEN Glub-dub, cave men, years ago
 Went courting of a maid,
 He brought his bear skins and his shells,
 And unto her he said:
 "Now, will you marry me, my love?
 (I have a dugout, too!)"
 She hung her head and unto him
 Piped softly, "Dub, you'll do!"

And so the dubs of modern day
 Go courting as of yore,
 With diamonds, lace, and limousines
 And bearskins by the score;
 Young Dub perchance may also be
 A hero in life's game,
 With heart of gold and mental gifts—
 The answer is the same:

"Huh, Dub, your line is bunk to me—
 There's lots of dubs like you;
 Twice what you've got is what I want—
 (One plane de luxe won't do!)
 Just corner John D.'s gasoline,
 Six motor plants as well—
 The question that you mention, Dub,
 Involves the H. C. L!"

How Many Cards?

by Isabel Ostrander

Author of "Ashes to Ashes," "Twenty-Six Clues," "Suspense," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

EX-ROUNDSMAN TIMOTHY MCCARTY followed a suspicious-looking figure along the avenue. When the man entered the Creveling house, McCarty hid in the areaway. A moment later the second-story man leaped from a window and the ex-officer collared him. Clancy, the officer on the beat, answered his call for assistance, but the young burglar insisted he was not responsible for what they would find inside.

On the library floor they found a gentleman in evening clothes shot through the heart. An army .44 lay close to his hand. Off the library was a breakfast-room with the remains of a late supper. From the rug McCarty picked up a bit of broken amber, part of a cigarette-holder. Clancy notified borough headquarters, and McCarty sent for his friend, Inspector Druet.

The house was empty of servants, but on the third floor two of the servants' rooms were littered with clothes. While the ex-roundsman and the inspector were looking over this floor of the house, McCarty thought he first heard, then saw a fleeting form as he looked over the stairs to the floor below.

Then the bell rang and McCarty admitted a dapper gentleman, who explained he had arrived in answer to an urgent telephone message, which insisted that he come at once. He stated he was George Alexander, Mrs. Creveling's uncle, and her husband's business partner. The inspector's examination of Alexander failed to reveal any leads. The dead man's partner was as guarded in his answers as Frank Hill, Creveling's valet, who next arrived on the scene. The valet testified he had taken a bag of clean linen to his master at the club on the previous night at eleven o'clock, after arranging for the supper at the house. Rollins, the butler, and his wife, the cook, had been given a holiday, and the other servants had been dismissed when Mrs. Creveling set out on her round of visits.

McCarty in the meantime unearthed another lead; under the table-cover in the library he found a playing card, the nine of diamonds, blood-stained and torn.

The ex-roundsman was pressing the valet to explain his whereabouts from eleven o'clock of the night before until his arrival on the scene, when Mrs. Creveling arrived and demanded: "What has happened to my husband?"

CHAPTER VII.

"WHO KILLED HIM?"

THE woman's tones were low and well modulated, but they seemed to soar to the topmost reaches of the galleried rotunda in the momentousness of their question, and as they died away in a quivering silence, even the matter-of-fact McCarty felt a cold shiver of apprehension.

It seemed an age before George Alexander, with a little nervous clearing of his throat, advanced to meet her.

"My dear Myra!" There was mingled

astonishment and dismay in his voice, and beneath it McCarty detected that same under note as of caution with which the banker had previously addressed the valet. "How could my telegram have reached you so quickly? I—we didn't expect—"

"I know nothing of any telegram, Uncle George." Myra Creveling's voice still seemed strangely remote. "The cook telephoned out to me—at least I believe it was Sarah—that some accident had happened to Eugene. But who are these men? Frank, where is Mr. Creveling?"

After a brief glance at the inspector and

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for July 24.

McCarty, her eyes had fastened themselves upon the valet, and as he opened his lips to reply the former stepped forward.

"You are Mrs. Creveling?"

"I am." Her glance returned to Inspector Druet. "May I ask who you are and what you are doing in my house?"

"Myra, my dear," Alexander interposed hastily, "you must prepare yourself for a great shock, a great grief! This man is an inspector from the police department; Eugene was found here dead!"

For a moment her wide violet eyes stared deep into her uncle's, and there came a sudden tensing of the lines of her beautiful face, but no outcry, no faintness, no other signs of normal emotion. Then from her stiffened lips there issued one single question—

"Who killed him?"

McCarty glanced inadvertently at his superior. If the supposed maid had telephoned to her mistress merely that Creveling had met with some accident, why had his wife on learning that he was dead instantly assume that he had been murdered?

Inspector Druet, however, did not take up that thread at once. Instead, he gestured deprecatingly, but with unmistakable authority to a throne chair which stood between two torch-lamps near where she had halted and asked:

"At what hour did your cook telephone to you, Mrs. Creveling?"

Obediently, almost mechanically, the lady seated herself and, loosening her coat, drew off her veil.

"At about five o'clock this morning, a trifle before the hour, I think." She put one hand to her forehead for a moment, but there was no dazed look to shock in the direct, clear gaze she bent upon her questioner.

"And that was all the message, that there had been an accident? You asked for no particulars?"

"I had no opportunity. That was all the message that was delivered to me. I did not receive it myself, the butler at Broadmead, where I was staying, replied to the telephone, then awakened my maid, who in turn brought the news to me. I understood that the cook—the only maid-

servant left here—had said that I must come home at once, that something had happened to my husband."

At about five! That had been the hour when Alexander first made his appearance at the house, a few minutes after McCarty had concluded his solitary second search of the rooms up-stairs. The agitated elderly gentleman had not thought of sending the wire to his niece until a good half-hour afterward; it must have been a quarter of six, at least, when the detective from borough headquarters reached the nearest telegraph office to despatch the message. Why had none of them thought to telephone direct to Broadmead instead?

As McCarty asked himself this question he glanced inadvertently at Alexander just in time to intercept a look which flashed between the banker and the valet; a deliberate motion of command with his eyes toward the room back of him which he had just left, the room with the disordered supper-table still laid for two. McCarty's own eyes turned to Hill to find him slipping, catlike, toward the door in a movement which the man himself instantly checked.

Mrs. Creveling's testimony was of utmost value at the moment, but McCarty made up his mind to keep his own attention upon this strangely assorted pair as well.

"You immediately aroused your host?" prompted the inspector.

"My hostess," Mrs. Creveling corrected him, still in that monotonous, remote tone without obvious display of repression. "Mr. Waverley was not at Broadmead last night. Inspector, who killed my husband?"

Now, indeed, her voice had changed, but with no poignant outburst of pent-up grief. It rang out hard and cold and sharp as steel, and behind it there was a stern, implacable determination to know the truth.

"What makes you think that any one killed him?" the inspector countered swiftly. "Your maid telephoned that an accident had occurred, and your uncle here has merely informed you that Mr. Creveling was found dead."

She shrugged, and a faint smile, as of scorn, curled her mobile lips for an instant before they settled again in that unyielding line.

"What fatal accident could have befallen him in his own home?" Her long, slim, white hands dismissed the possibility with a gesture of finality. "My husband was in perfect health, and there can be no question of suicide. I demand to be told at once how he died."

"He was found in the study or library which opens just beside the staircase there, shot in the heart. The weapon, an army .44, was within reach of his hand, and there was no living person in the house except those who discovered the body," Inspector Druet replied gravely. "Mrs. Creveling, when was it that you last saw your husband alive?"

"Last Sunday. He came down to Broadmead over the week-end." She broke off and asked quickly: "Who found my husband? Was it Rollins or Sarah? Where are they?"

Frank Hill, the valet, interposed.

"Mr. Creveling himself gave them a holiday yesterday, Mrs. Creveling," he said.

She darted a swift glance at him and nodded slowly, but, save for a slight tightening of her lips, her expression did not change for a moment. Then a quick thought came to her.

"The who—"

Her uncle divined the question before it was uttered.

"We don't know. I was summoned, too, by telephone some little time before you were, but it was a man who called me, a stranger. I don't remember ever having heard his voice until early this morning." He spoke hastily, almost furtively. "Eugene entertained some one at supper here late last night, Myra, some client of ours probably—"

"Did you know that he intended doing so, Mrs. Creveling?" interrupted the inspector brusquely. "Do you know who the person was?"

She shook her head.

"No," she responded composedly. "I only know that if my husband was shot he was murdered. I do not wish to act in opposition to the authorities, but it is permitted, I believe, that in a case like this I may engage private investigators to co-operate with them?"

The inspector bowed, but George Alexander started forward.

"Myra! Such a step would be most—most unnecessary. I am sure that the authorities are perfectly capable of handling this terrible situation, and that they know best. I myself thought at first that it could not have been a case of suicide, but the pistol lay within touch of his fingers. I—I saw it myself. If you drag in blundering private detectives you will subject us to needless and distressing notoriety. This shock has dazed you, you are not quite yourself, my dear. If you will take time to think the matter over—"

"I have thought." Mrs. Creveling favored her uncle with a long inscrutable look, and before it he seemed all at once to shrivel and the lines of age which grooming and care had kept smooth stood out in his pallid face. "I knew Eugene better than any one in the world, and I know that the suggestion of suicide is absolutely untenable. I'm going to find out who killed him, Uncle George, if I move heaven and earth to do so. I have heard of a man, a scientific criminologist, I believe he is called, who is quite famous in his way. I want him if he is to be had. His name is Wade Terhune."

A swift glance passed between the inspector and McCarty, and the former shrugged with a slight smile. McCarty grinned in answer. So once more Terhune, with his little scientific recording instruments and his trained analytical mind, was to be pitted against the routine methods of the force and McCarty's own efforts. It seemed a stroke of fate that the ex-roundsman, the inspector, and the crime-savant should be again upon the trail, and the former looked forward with grim humor to Terhune's appearance on the scene of the tragedy.

"Mr. Terhune has often been called in by the department, and my special deputy here and I have worked personally with him on more than one case." Inspector Druet turned to Mrs. Creveling, who still preserved her stoic calm. "I have the telephone number here of his private, unlisted wire; shall I have him summoned for you?"

"Myra!" Mr. Alexander put in a final

remonstrance. "Think well what you are doing. If Eugene were really—er—murdered I am sure the inspector is fully capable of finding the guilty man. These private detectives are always looking for press notices, and the notoriety will be hideous. Do you realize?"

"I realize everything, Uncle George, and my mind is made up," Mrs. Creveling replied with a quiet finality of tone which brooked no further opposition. "I do not imply that the police department is incapable of handling this—this crime, but I want to feel that I myself am leaving no stone unturned to discover by whose hand my husband came to his death. If the inspector will give you his number I wish you would go and call up Mr. Terhune yourself for me. Tell him to name his own price, anything, but to come immediately as I am anxious to consult him.

When Mr. Alexander, accompanied by the inspector, had retired to the study upon his reluctantly assumed mission, McCarty stepped forward, with one eye still on the valet, and coughed deferentially.

"I'm the special deputy Inspector Druet put on this case with himself, ma'am. McCarty's my name. Is there any one else you want sent for? Any relative or friend, I mean?"

Once more Mrs. Creveling shook her head.

"Neither Mr. Creveling nor I have any relative beside my uncle, Mr. Alexander," she responded. "My maid will follow on the next train from Long Island, and the butler and cook will probably return at any moment now, as I was expected home this morning, in any event. I do not want my friends about me. I want to be alone, to think."

To think, but not to grieve. One look at that stern countenance, as immobile as that of some goddess carved in marble, would have shown to far less astute eyes than McCarty's that Myra Creveling would permit no breakdown, no unleashing of her emotions until her dominating purpose was achieved. That she had jumped so hastily to the conclusion her husband had been murdered pointed to the probability that she also strongly suspected the identity of

the murderer, but it would be futile to question her on that score at the present moment.

"Of course that's only natural, ma'am." McCarty spoke soothingly. "Still, I'm sure you'll be wanting to give us all the help you can, and every minute counts now. In a case like this, where we've got practically no clue and nothing to go on, we'll have to find out what we can from Mr. Creveling's friends. I believe you said that Mr. Waverley was not at Broadmead last night. Were any other of your friends there? Mr. Alexander mentioned a Mr. and Mrs. O'Rourke, a lady named Culp or Kip—"

"Oh, they are in our set, of course, but none of them were at Broadmead," Mrs. Creveling interrupted. "There was no house party; I was just visiting there quietly for a few days."

"Where was Mr. Waverley last night? Was he expected out at his home?"

"No, he was at one of his clubs, I suppose. He telephoned out before dinner that he would be detained in town over night. Mrs. Waverley and I were alone at Broadmead with the servants." She paused and then spoke in a quickened tone. "Mr. McCarty, you said just now that you had no clues. If my butler and cook have been away since yesterday, who was the man who summoned my uncle and the woman who telephoned to me? If those calls could be traced I should think you would have a very real clue to material witnesses at least."

McCarty nodded gravely.

"We may be able to learn their identity, though 'twill be no easy matter; they might have phoned from pay-stations, you know, ma'am. 'Tis unlikely that either of them was the murderer, if murder was done. Mr. Alexander must have been called up after four o'clock, and you say the message came to you a little before five. Now, Mr. Creveling's body was discovered a few minutes past two, and, according to the opinion of the medical examiner, he must have been dead an hour before that; plenty of time, you see, for the murderer to have got clean away. Does the Waverley's butler know your cook?"

"It is possible; I'm sure I don't know." There was a touch of hauteur in her tone.

CHAPTER VIII.

"MR. DOUGLAS WAVERLEY, SIR."

"I WAS only wondering whether he recognized her voice or whether the woman told him who she was," McCarty explained mildly. "Do you know a Mr. Cutter?"

The slender, white hands resting on the arms of her chair gripped tensely at the sudden question, but she replied without hesitation or surprise.

"Nicholas Cutter? Certainly. He is one of our closest friends."

"And the O'Rourkes, and Fords, and the lady named Culp or Kip?" McCarty persisted. "Will you give me their full names and addresses, please? Are they all in the same set?"

"They are all in my immediate circle of friends, if that is what you mean." As if suddenly conscious of those betraying hands she lifted them and let them fall idly into her lap. "Of course, Mr. Creveling had many casual friends of whom I know nothing, clubmen and business associates, but those you mention have been our social intimates for years. Mr. and Mrs. Lonsdale Ford live at the St. Maur Apartments on Madison Avenue; Mrs. Baillie Kip, if that is whom you mean, has a house on East Sixty-Third Street, and Mr. and Mrs. John Cavanaugh O'Rourke have taken the Hartington residence a few blocks above us, on the avenue here. The Waverleys' town house is two blocks south."

McCarty had scarcely heard the last sentence. His face flushed, and with shining eyes he repeated:

"John Cavanaugh O'Rourke! Would you know, Mrs. Creveling, if he came from the old country, from near Dublin?"

"Yes. He and his wife both came from there about six years ago. She was Lady Margaret Sinclair." The even voice responded without show of interest, almost automatically.

"Little Lady Peggy!" McCarty murmured softly to himself. "She and the son

of 'the' O'Rourke! To think of it! The years do be sliding along fast!"

He was apparently absorbed, although the light in his eyes had suddenly misted in jotting down the addresses on the back of an envelope, and as he replaced it in his pocket he looked up with a return of his deferential yet businesslike air.

"Your housekeeper has gone back to Scotland, I understand. Did she leave all the keys of the house with you, ma'am? Did the servants who were dismissed turn theirs in?"

"I suppose so. At least, Mrs. Jarvie gave me a small box filled with keys all labeled. I can show them to you later." Mrs. Creveling rose as her uncle reentered from the study, accompanied by the inspector. "Did you reach Mr. Terhune, Uncle George? Will he undertake the case for me?"

"He will be here as soon as his car can bring him," Mr. Alexander replied. "I fancy my call got him out of his bed, however, for it isn't quite eight o'clock yet, and it will take him a short time at least to dress. If you wish to retire in the mean time to your rooms and compose yourself for your interview with him, I am sure that Inspector Druet will have no objection. We must not put too great a strain upon you after this fearful shock."

"There is just one more question I should like to ask Mrs. Creveling now." The inspector stepped forward hastily. "Had your husband any cause to fear for his life? To your knowledge had he any enemies, Mrs. Creveling?"

McCarty did not hear the lady's reply. The tail of his eye, which had never left the valet's spare, black-clad form, caught him slinking toward a door on the other side of the staircase, and as the man disappeared within it he was close upon the other's heels. Hill moved swiftly with his accustomed noiseless tread, and so intent upon his errand was he that he did not hear the careful but heavier steps behind him. The door led into a rear hallway, and the two proceeded beyond the back stairs and around a turning past the pantries and kitchen toward the tradesmen's entrance.

A tall, angular, middle-aged woman was

advancing along the hall, and behind her appeared the shorter, more rotund figure of a man evidently some years her senior. Both were dressed in the simplest of outdoor attire, and their bearing betrayed their identity even before the woman spoke.

"Don't you remind us that we're late, Frank," she said sharply, "we've had a dreadful night: fire in the flat below Rollins's sister's, and never a wink of sleep for any of us. I'm sure I wish Mr. Creveling would have his parties somewhere else and leave us in peace—"

She stopped abruptly on catching sight of the stranger behind the valet and her close-set eyes seemed boring him through like gimlets. Before Hill could interpose the fat elderly man spoke over her shoulder:

"Lizzie couldn't 'elp the fire, but Sarah will have 'er—ullo! Who's this?"

Hill darted a 'swift glance behind, and for the first time McCarty caught a glimpse of the man's countenance with the mask off. It was drawn and distorted and a gleam of incalculable cunning shone from the narrowed eyes. The next instant, with a twisted smile, he had stepped aside.

"Perhaps you'd like to tell them yourself, sir." He waved his hand toward the newcomers. "It's Rollins and Sarah."

The two stood rooted to the spot as McCarty stepped forward.

"Police headquarters," he announced bluntly. "You are Sarah Rollins, the cook here? Did you telephone out to Broadmead where Mrs. Creveling is staying during last night?"

"Police!" the woman gasped in a shrill whisper. "Whatever's been goin' on? What would I telephone to Mrs. Creveling for? I'm one that minds my own business and makes no trouble."

Unfeigned astonishment was blazoned upon her thin, acidulous face, but no sign of apprehension, and satisfied that he had been answered McCarty turned to her husband.

"You're the butler? Did you telephone to Mr. George Alexander about half-past four this morning?"

"Mr. Alexander!" Rollins repeated in evident stupefaction. "At 'alf after four I was trying to settle to a bit of sleep again

in my bed at my sister's. The house she lives in took on fire at two, and we were all routed out in our—as we were, sir. I 'ad no occasion to telephone to Mr. Alexander or any one else. What is it? What's been going on 'ere, robbery?"

"Mr. Creveling was shot to death here in his study some time during the night." McCarty watched the effect of his words narrowly. "Do you know who was supposed to have had supper here with him?"

"Shot!" It was the cook who uttered the exclamation, and her husband turned on her before she could continue.

"We know nothing about it!" His ruddy face had paled, and the assertion, although seemingly addressed to McCarty, was as obviously intended for the woman. "This is terrible business, sir. 'Ow—'ow did it 'appen?"

"That's what I'm here to find out," McCarty retorted grimly. "Did you know why Mr. Creveling gave you a little holiday yesterday?"

"Why, yes, sir," the butler stammered. "I'd asked 'im for leave to run up to Boston over night some time this week to see my brother-in-law on business, and yesterday Mr. Creveling told me to go last night, and take Sarah with me if I liked; I understood that Frank would be 'ere to look after the 'ouse."

"Why didn't you go to Boston, then?" demanded McCarty quickly.

"Because my brother-in-law 'ad returned to the city. I phoned my sister to tell 'er we were going, and she said 'e 'ad come home; that's why we went to 'er flat 'ere instead."

"And stayed over night instead of coming back here to your own rooms to sleep?" There was contemptuous incredulity in McCarty's tones. "Why did you do that?"

"Because we talked late and my brother-in-law and I split a bottle that he'd got 'old of somewhere." Rollins spoke sullenly, and then, as if in afterthought, roused himself to what was probably expected of him. "Mr. Creveling dead! This is 'orrible, sir, 'orrible! A fine, free-handed gentleman he was. Did a burglar break in, do you think?"

"I'm asking questions, not answering

them," McCarty asseverated sternly. "If you're not more frank with me than this fellow here has been it's likely to go as hard with you as it will with him. Who had supper with Mr. Creveling here last night?"

"I don't know, sir, strike me pink! No more does Sarah. We're paid to do our work and keep our place, and we've done both, as Mr. Creveling 'imself would tell you if 'e was alive to do it. Mr. Creveling has entertained gentlemen 'ere now and again, but we didn't know he expected any one last night. Has Mrs. Creveling been sent for, sir?"

"She is here."

"Here!" Sarah threw up her hands. "And her room's not in order, and me with all that lobster and stuff from the caterer's to clean up! Let me pass! Police or no, I've got my work to do. I don't know anything about what happened to poor Mr. Creveling, and you needn't be afraid I'll run away. You'll find me here when you want me!"

McCarty opened his lips as if to speak, then thought better of it and obediently stepped aside, but he gazed after the woman's departing figure with a quizzical look in his twinkling eyes. When she had disappeared he turned once more to the butler.

"How long have you and your wife been employed here?"

"Three years," Rollins replied. "I've never worked for a nicer family—in America, that is. Always extra 'elp when they entertained, and I could 'ave 'ad a second footman any time I'd wanted to ask for one. This will be a bad job for us, getting mixed up in scandal at our time of life, and we've always been so particular about our positions, too!"

"Where does this sister of yours live, Rollins?" McCarty cut short the flow of lamentation.

"Just across the park, sir, in West Ninety-Fourth Street, a door or two from Columbus Avenue. I'll write the address down for you." The butler's hands fumbled shakily in his pockets. "Her name is Mrs. William Carroll, and she can tell you that both Sarah and me were with her all night."

McCarty smiled to himself. He would

have surer proof than that, for the engine and hose company which his particular crony, Dennis Riordan, adorned with his presence was located in the same precinct; Denny would have the best of reasons for knowing if there had been a fire at two that morning.

"'Tis just a matter of form," McCarty remarked. "Now, Rollins come clean! That stuff about keeping your place is all right, but you are in a position to know the truth, and I want it. You've heard all the family conversation at table, whether you wanted to listen or not; did you ever hear Mr. Creveling speak of any one he hated or who hated him? Was there any one who would be glad to get him out of the way?"

Hill had followed the cook kitchenward, and Rollins's gaze traveled past his questioner to the shadowed turn in the hall as he hesitated.

Finally he spoke. "Both Mr. and Mrs. Creveling was too 'ighly bred to discuss their affairs before any of the 'ousehold, sir. 'E was a very forceful man, and I've no doubt made enemies, but none that could 'ave wished 'im out of the way, though there was one that 'e had 'igh words with one night not a fortnight ago."

"Who was that?" McCarty demanded. "One of his intimate friends?"

The butler nodded.

"It was Mr. Douglas Waverley, sir," he said.

CHAPTER IX.

MC CARTY PAYS A VISIT.

"WELL, well! So we have our friend and confrère, Mr. McCarty, with us once more! Are you going to lend us your valuable assistance in this case?"

A tall, spare, slightly bald, slightly stoop-shouldered figure detached himself from the group about the throne chair as McCarty made his reappearance in the reception-hall and advanced a step or two with outstretched hand.

There was amused condescension in his alert, self-confident manner and a hint of

sarcasm in the crisp tones which made the honest face of the ex-roundsman flush, but he responded quietly as he shook hands: "Inspector Druet has taken me on as special deputy, Mr. Terhune. I happened to be on hand when the body was discovered."

"As usual, eh?" The noted criminalist smiled a trifle wryly. "Really, if the word had not been so much abused I should call you an opportunist, my dear McCarty! I have accepted Mrs. Creveling's commission to investigate the affair in her behalf, and I presume that we can count on your co-operation? If you were here when the crime was first discovered, perhaps you will be good enough to give me the details; I have learned nothing as yet except that Mr. Creveling was found shot through the heart, and my client refuses to entertain the theory of suicide."

McCarty complied willingly enough, but with certain reservations. He led Wade Terhune first to the study and described the finding of the body and the episode of the burglar, but made no mention of the blood-stained playing-card, nor of the result of his second search of the rooms upstairs. It would be time to impart that information to the private detective when he had first laid the facts before his chief.

In the breakfast-room they came upon Rollins hastily removing the debris of the supper which had ended so tragically, and as Terhune paused to question him McCarty slipped away and, rejoining the group in the hall, led Inspector Druet aside.

"The cook and the butler are back, sir, and I think if you don't need me for a while I'll be getting on; there are a few things I want to look into. You'll be holding that valet, Frank Hill?"

"Of course; until he gives us some sort of an alibi that we can establish. He's our one best bet now unless you've got some dope you haven't told me about." The inspector glanced at him shrewdly.

McCarty's eyes twinkled.

"I've had no time, sir, and besides I've nothing definite as yet; but if you'll be going back down-town soon, I'll come in and make my report. When you frisk this

man Hill at headquarters, if you find a pair of gloves on him, keep them aside till I get there."

"Gloves on a warm spring night!" The inspector's own eyes narrowed. "For a valet, he must be some classy dresser! There were none on him when he came to the door of the breakfast-room."

"You'll find them in one of his pockets, most likely," McCarty remarked carelessly. "See you later, chief."

As he turned to go, the telephone in the study shrilled in subdued insistence, and Rollins appeared in the door of the breakfast-room, but, at a sign from the inspector, McCarty was before him.

Crossing the study, he lifted the bronze ornament from the telephone and held the receiver to his ear.

"Hello! Can I speak to Mrs. Creveling, please?" It was a man's voice cultured in its intonations and yet with a note of inherent grossness.

"Who is it, sir?" McCarty asked cautiously.

"Mr. Douglas Waverley."

McCarty pondered for a moment, and then spoke with his voice carefully modulated. "Mrs. Creveling is indisposed. Can I take a message, sir?"

"This isn't Rollins talking! Is he there or Frank? My wife just telephoned to me that some sort of an accident had happened to Mr. Creveling, and I want to know if there is anything I can do. Please convey that message to Mrs. Creveling."

"Very good, sir." McCarty waited for a brief space, and then spoke into the mouth-piece once more. "Mrs. Creveling is sending me down in person with a message, sir. It is most important, and she doesn't want any one here just now. Where can I find you?"

"At the Belterre Hotel." The reply came after a moment of evident hesitation. "I'll expect you in about half an hour. Who the devil are you, anyway? What happened to Mr. Creveling?"

"I'll tell you, sir, when I come."

McCarty hung up the receiver and, returning to the hall, made his way out by the tradesmen's entrance. It was still too early for much traffic, but a huge green bus

like some monstrous beetle came lumbering past in the bright glare of sunlight, and as McCarty swung himself aboard he glanced back at the house which he had just left.

The lower windows were shrouded and blank, but at one of the upper ones he caught a glimpse of a woman's white face staring down at him. As she caught his eye she withdrew hastily and the curtains were drawn together.

Who could she have been? He had left Mrs. Creveling still seated in the throne chair in the hall, and he was certain that the face he had seen was a rounder, more youthful one than the thin, acidulous countenance of the cook. Had some woman remained concealed in that house, despite the rigorous search of the men from borough headquarters?

He felt an impulse to descend from the bus and return to investigate, but a second thought restrained him; Mr. Douglas Waverley had named a half-hour later for their interview, and he had stated with evident reluctance that he was at the Belterre Hotel. McCarty had a theory of his own as to that, and he must reach his destination as quickly as possible in order to put it to the test.

On alighting from the bus, he entered the lobby of the hotel, but instead of approaching the desk to announce himself he strolled to the news-stand, purchased a paper, and dropped into a chair by the less conspicuous side entrance of the huge hostelry. The lobby was astir with early-risen patrons departing upon the business of the day, but few people entered from the street, and these McCarty regarded with swift appraisal from behind the screening folds of his newspaper.

At length a taxi grounded against the curb, and a stout man alighted, carrying a small bag, which he impatiently refused to deliver into the hands of the porter. McCarty eyed him as he strode past and over to the desk, where he leaned across the counter and spoke to the clerk in a hurried undertone. At the latter's shake of the head the newcomer scrawled his name hastily in the register and, turning, followed a bell-boy to the elevator.

He was apparently about forty, and the small, light-blue eyes set in his smooth, red face reminded McCarty somewhat irrelevantly of those of a pig. The latter waited for a few minutes, and then, rising, tossed his paper aside and walked over to the desk. Two more arrivals had made their appearance and registered in the interim, but above theirs the hastily written signature of the fat man stood out boldly, and McCarty smiled to himself. His theory had proved to be a correct one.

"Will you be sending word to Mr. Douglas Waverley that the man he expects is here?" he requested.

The dapper young man behind the counter raised his eyebrows.

"What name?" he snapped.

"I didn't say." McCarty smiled blandly at him. "You'll be sending the message as I gave it, please."

His tone was quiet, but there was a ring of authority in it that the clerk recognized, and with a shrug he turned to the girl at the switchboard.

"You can go right up." He returned to the counter once more. "Suite eleven-four."

McCarty alighted from the elevator at the eleventh floor, and knocked at the door of apartment No. 4.

"Come in." It was unmistakably the same voice which had talked to him over the wire at the Creveling house.

McCarty obeyed, and his eyes twinkled anew as he glanced about him. The room was in disorder with clothing and newspapers scattered about, and through the connecting doorway he could see the bed with its covers thrown back over the foot and its pillows rumpled. Before him the stout, red-faced man stood attired in bathrobe and slippers.

"You're from Mrs. Creveling?" the latter demanded.

"I've come straight from her house, Mr. Waverley, though it's questions I've brought, not a message." McCarty's manner was respectful, but the twinkle had died out of his eyes. "If you'll answer me straight I'll not keep you long, sir, from the sleep you must be needing."

"Who are you?" Mr. Waverley turned

a shade more red. "What do you mean about my needing sleep? I don't believe you have come from Mrs. Creveling at all; you are an impostor!"

"They don't call me that down at police headquarters, Mr. Waverley," McCarty interrupted still quietly. "You only reached the hotel ten minutes ago; the ink is hardly dry on your name in the register, and, finding you ready for bed like this, I thought you must need some sleep."

"Police headquarters!" The ruddy face paled. "That fool clerk down-stairs said that no one had called for me—"

"And no more they had, sir. I've been waiting down in the lobby some little time for you to come in; I knew you were never here when you telephoned." McCarty paused, and then asked sharply: "Mr. Waverley, when did you last see Mr. Eugene Creveling?"

"Why, the night before last—Tuesday," the other stammered. "What's all the row about? Has he disappeared? My wife said something about an accident, but if it is just that he hasn't turned up—"

"He's turned up, all right, sir—turned up his toes on the floor of his study, shot through the heart!" McCarty watched the effect of his announcement carefully.

"'Gene Creveling! Good God, it's impossible!" Waverley's flabby jowls took on a purplish tinge and his pale-blue eyes seemed to protrude from the sockets. "You don't mean murder!"

"Looks like it, sir. The last time you saw him alive was on Tuesday night? Where was this?"

"At Nick Cutter's." Waverley raised a thick, pudgy hand to the folds of flesh which hung pendulous over his throat as though the collar of his bath-robe had suddenly grown too tight. "God! Creveling dead! I suppose you're a detective, but why have you come to me?"

"To get the particulars of how you learned of the supposed 'accident,' sir." McCarty's smile was disarmingly candid. "You say your wife telephoned to you; where did she get you on the wire?"

"She didn't; I telephoned to her," Waverley disclaimed, ignoring the question. "I wanted her to bring Mrs. Creveling and

motor in to town for lunch, meant to dig up Creveling, and drag him back to the country this afternoon. Mrs. Waverley told me that a message had come between half past four and five o'clock this morning from Mrs. Creveling's cook, summoning her immediately to town; that Mr. Creveling had met with some accident. They're intimate friends of ours, and naturally I called up Mrs. Creveling at once to learn what had happened and to offer my services. I never thought of anything like this! I can't believe it even yet. My God, it's horrible! Who—who could have done it?"

CHAPTER X.

THE CIGARETTE CASE.

HE sank into a chair and reached shakily for the fresh pitcher of ice-water upon the table at his elbow. McCarty waited until he had drunk deep, and then, as the pitcher clattered upon the table once more, he observed:

"So the Crevelings are intimate friends of yours, sir? How long have you known them?"

"Look here, what are you driving at? Creveling and I palled around together for years before he was married, and he was a frequent visitor at our house. Naturally, when he became engaged my wife met Miss Alexander, and since their marriage they have been closely identified with our immediate circle. My wife and Mrs. Creveling are almost inseparable."

"And you and Mr. Creveling, sir? Have you been getting on together lately as well as you used to?" McCarty's tone was ingratiating. "You'll excuse me, Mr. Waverley, but didn't you and he have a quarrel not so long ago?"

"'Quarrel'?" the other repeated, and straightened himself suddenly in his chair as though to meet an unexpected thrust. "Great Heavens, no! Who told you such a lie?"

"You didn't have a dispute with Mr. Creveling in his own house one night not a fortnight ago?" McCarty persisted. "I don't like to make mention of a lady—"

"By God, you'd better not!" Waverley rose from his chair with a threatening scowl. "I've stood for about all of this that I'm going to, my man! I don't know where you've got your lying information, nor by what authority you come here to try to put me through a third degree, but I'll listen to no more. Get out before I phone the office and have you put out!"

"I wouldn't try it, sir, if I were you," McCarty said blandly. "I'd have to ask you to take a little ride down-town with me and the head house-detective here and tell the inspector in charge of the case what it was you and Mr. Creveling almost came to blows about after that little supper week before last. I thought you'd rather keep out of the notoriety and all; that's why I came to you quiet like."

"So that's it!" Waverley's lip curled. "Graft, eh? Blackm—"

"Don't go too far, sir!" McCarty's tone was ominously quiet, and there was a glint of steel in his eyes. "It 'll do you no good to be calling names. I've got proof that two weeks ago come to-morrow night you had supper alone with Mr. Creveling in his house, and high words passed between you over a lady: I've a witness who can testify to that. I'm not one to work up sensations for the press to spring on the public and drag people that's maybe innocent into notoriety and scandal; 'twas for that I came here to you, man to man."

"Did your witness tell you the name of the lady who was supposed to have been discussed on that occasion?" Waverley sneered.

"If that's the way you care to put it, yes, sir," responded McCarty. "There were two ladies talked of, for the matter of that, but only one mentioned by name. You left the house in a rage, I understand, yet Mrs. Creveling stayed on as a guest at your country place, and Creveling himself spent the last week-end there."

"That ought to be proof enough to you that there was no trouble between us." Waverley's tone had become all at once eager and conciliatory. "Sorry I misunderstood your motive in coming here. I'm quite willing to tell you all about that little

argument with 'Gene Creveling, for I can see that it has been greatly exaggerated to you.

"I don't know who your witness is, but I presume it is that rascally butler, Rollins; I warned Creveling to sack him long ago. I did not leave the house in a rage, as you have been told, but in sheer disgust. If Creveling is dead, I'm damned sorry, but there's no use blinking the facts: his course of conduct hasn't been exactly straight and narrow, and although we are none of us angels, I took it upon myself as an old and intimate friend to remonstrate with him, and he didn't accept it in the right spirit. That's all there was to it; it was all forgotten the next day."

"And since then you've been on friendly terms with him, Mr. Waverley?"

"Absolutely."

"Your mutual friends can vouch for that, I suppose? 'Tis not that I doubt your word, sir, but the inspector may want to check up my report." McCarty paused and added: "We know approximately the hour at which Mr. Creveling came to his death, and if you'll tell me where you were last night from eleven o'clock on, it 'll put an end to all annoyance for you."

"And if I don't choose to do so?" The flabby face had darkened again truculently.

McCarty shrugged. "That's up to you, sir."

There was a pause, and then Waverley spoke thickly.

"Have you the authority to keep it out of the papers? I mean, if I tell you where I was and prove it to you, can you keep it from reaching my wife's ears? Oh, there was nothing absolutely beyond the pale about it, but you know what women are!" he added hastily. "Can I count on you and your superiors to keep it quiet?"

"Well, sir, if your alibi's sound, it's no concern of the department what you have been doing," McCarty answered cautiously. "Of course, I can't guarantee that the reporters won't look you up, as having been intimate with Mr. Creveling, but it 'll be on no information from us. You telephoned out to your country place late yesterday afternoon that you would

be detained in town last night, Mrs. Creveling says."

"Y-yes." The light-blue eyes were lowered and his full under-lip protruded sullenly. "I met a man I know, and he invited me to a supper-party in his rooms; we whooped it up until after five this morning, and when the crowd had broken up I turned in there for a few hours' rest. My host is a good fellow and all that, but he's not quite the sort I'd take to my own home or introduce to my wife, and the party wasn't a stag affair."

"You understand? When I woke up I was disgusted with the aftermath, and on an impulse I phoned out to Mrs. Waverley to ask her to run into town for lunch, as I told you. She informed me of the message summoning Mrs. Creveling, and I called up their house."

"This man who invited you to supper in his rooms—you met him before you phoned out to Long Island yesterday afternoon, Mr. Waverley?"

"Naturally. I gave Mrs. Waverley some trivial excuse; I told her I had to attend a business conference with some out-of-town people here at the Belterre last evening, and it might be a late session. I intimated that if it were I would take a room here for the night." He spoke with evident reluctance.

"When I called her up this morning and she told me of the supposed accident, I realized she would take it for granted that I was here, and might try to get me later to find out what had happened to Creveling. That was why I told you I was stopping here and then hurried down to meet you."

"I see." McCarty nodded. "Who is the man that gave the party, Mr. Waverley? What is his name?"

The other hesitated, and then replied in a lowered tone: "Mr. Samuel J. Venner."

McCarty stared. Sam Venner bore a reputation that was far from savory even among the sporting element of the city, and his activities had more than once come under the scrutiny of the authorities on the lookout for new forms of confidence-games. How could he possibly have wormed himself into even a nodding ac-

quaintance with a man of Waverley's social standing?

"You fellows have heard of him, I imagine." Waverley shrugged in his turn. "He's quite a character around town, but I don't believe you've ever had anything on him."

"I've heard of him," McCarty admitted briefly. "Did you spend the whole evening with him, Mr. Waverley? After you accepted his invitation and phoned out to your wife, what did you do?"

"I went up to my town house, climbed into some dinner clothes which I had left there, and dropped in at the club." As if anticipating the inevitable question, he expatiated: "The Cosmopolitan Club. It was dead as a door-nail; nobody there I cared to talk to, and I drifted down to Sharp's chop-house for a bite, and then dropped in for the last act of 'The Girl from Paradise.'"

"All by yourself, Mr. Waverley? You were alone from the time you left your house?"

"Quite alone. I took a taxi directly from the theater up to Venner's apartment on Riverside Drive."

"Who else was in the party there?"

Again Waverley hesitated. He had been speaking more and more slowly, as though choosing his words with care, and now he raised his eyes half defiantly to those of McCarty.

"Isn't it enough for you if Venner corroborates my statement? There were other people present who would find themselves in just as awkward a position as I should be if the thing came out."

"The ladies or the gentlemen?" McCarty asked.

"Ladies'?" Waverley leered. "They were show-girls from the 'By-by Baby' company. I imagine they wouldn't object to a little free press-agent stuff, though Venner—"

He caught himself up sharply as though regretting the admission, and rose.

"I've nothing more to tell you. You can find out from Venner himself whether or not I was in his rooms from a little before midnight until an hour ago; and as for that little row with Creveling—Lord!

We've been having 'em for the last fifteen years or more over one thing or another. If he's been done in as you say, I'm inexpressibly shocked and grieved to hear it, as the rest of our crowd will be, for he was the best of good fellows, even if he did get out of bounds occasionally; but I know no more about his death than you do—not half as much, I fancy.”

“Just what do you mean by ‘out of bounds,’ Mr. Waverley?” McCarty ignored the hint to go, and stood his ground firmly.

“If your informant gave you the gist of our conversation on the night of the supposed quarrel, you ought to be able to figure that out for yourself.” The thick lips parted in an unpleasant smile. “You can’t expect a leopard to change his spots altogether, you know. Not that ‘Gene wasn’t genuinely fond of his wife, but he always had an eye for a pretty woman. I’d heard that he was going it a bit strong over a new case, and for Mrs. Creveling’s sake I thought I’d try to pull him up before it came to her ears. That’s how her name was dragged into the discussion.”

“And the lady in the case?”

“I can’t tell you her name because I don’t know it, but I wouldn’t if I did!” Waverley snapped. “You fellows go too far! I’m willing to meet you half-way, and I’m anxious to do all in my power, of course, to help you find out who shot Creveling, but I’m damned if I would drag in the name of any woman, especially in the case of a mere indiscretion like this.”

“How do you know it was a mere indiscretion?” McCarty demanded quickly.

“I knew Creveling.” The reply was terse. “He’d have every art dealer and collector of antiques searching for months for a certain Ming vase or ancient prayer-rug, and when he secured it he scarcely gave it a second glance. It was the same with beautiful women; he’d sit at their feet as long as they were indifferent, but if they gave the first sign of awakened interest—good night!”

“You are sure, then, that this affair hasn’t reached the ears of his wife?”

“Of course it hasn’t!” Waverley exclaimed hurriedly. “She has always be-

lieved in him implicitly; that’s why I wanted him to call a halt now.”

“Well, Mr. Waverley, I won’t trouble you any further if you’ve no objections to me calling up Mr. Venner, just as a matter of form, and verifying your statement.” McCarty moved tentatively toward the telephone set in the wall.

Waverley smiled again, and waved toward the instrument.

“Go as far as you like,” he invited magnanimously. “Venner’s number is Hudson 4-0-5-2.”

McCarty repeated it into the phone, and after a brief interval a deep voice growled at him over the wire: “Hello! What is it?”

“I want to speak to Mr. Venner.”

“You’re talking to him now. Who are you?”

“Mr. Douglas Waverley told me that I could reach him at your rooms,” McCarty said cautiously.

“Well, you can’t,” the voice responded. “He’s gone; left about an hour ago.”

“He was at that little party of yours last night?”

“Yes. Who the devil are you?”

McCarty hung up the receiver and turned to find Waverley still smiling derisively at him as he drew a cigarette from a diamond-encrusted case and then proffered it.

“Smoke?” he suggested. “I hope you’re satisfied now, my man. Of course, I don’t want to be hauled into the lime-light of a murder case, but for Creveling’s sake I’d be glad to help you if I could.”

McCarty shook his head at the offer of the cigarette. An air of preoccupation seemed suddenly to have settled upon him, and he replied absently:

“Yes, sir, I’m satisfied. Sorry to have troubled you, but in a case like this we’ve got to look into every stray bit of information that comes our way. Good morning, sir.”

Once outside the door, he made his way toward the elevator with a dazed sense of unreality. Could he have seen aright, and if so was there any special significance in what he had beheld? There had been nine jewels in that flat oblong of gold, four

down each side and one in the middle, each set in sharply defined diamond-shaped indentations, so that the cigarette-case itself bore a startling resemblance to the nine of diamonds; startling to McCarty's mind at least because of that other nine of diamonds, torn and blood-stained, which he had found in the room where Eugene Creveling came to his death.

CHAPTER XI.

"A FISH TO FRY."

DENNIS RIORDAN, dragging a chair after him, emerged from the engine-house of Company No. 023, and settled himself in the mild, balmy sunshine. Down the vista of the street lined by tall flats the trees of the park, their tops just burgeoning into feathery green, formed a delicate touch of color in the monotonous, faded brick and stone, and the fireman's gray eyes rested upon them ruminatively as he reached for his pipe. Then his gaze shifted with lively expectancy, and the hand groping for his pocket paused midway, for a familiar figure turned the corner and strode toward him.

"What's up, Mac?" he asked when the figure had approached within hearing distance. "I thought you were going down to Homevale to-day to evict that tenant of yours that's driving the neighbors crazy with his cornet practise. You look as though you'd been making a night of it!"

"I have." With the privilege of a constant visitor McCarty reached a long arm across the threshold and, procuring another chair, placed it with its back tilted against the wall beside his friend. "When are you off duty to-day?"

"Not till six." Dennis eyed the other with anxious solicitude. "How much did you lose?"

"Didn't I give up card-playing for Lent?" McCarty demanded reproachfully.

"You did, but well I know what that means as long as you can find a quiet little crap game to horn in on, or any one to flip the coins with you! 'Tis a crying shame, property or no, for a man in the prime of life to have nothing to do but gallivant

around town looking for trouble, and many's the time I've cursed your uncle—God rest his soul!—for leaving you the money that made you resign from the force!"

His manner was almost maternal, and McCarty chuckled dryly.

"'Tis not always I have to be looking for trouble, Denny; sometimes it falls on me, like that girl from the window of the Glamorgan a couple of years ago."

There was that in his tone which made Dennis's chair come down on all four legs with a clatter on the sidewalk.

"What!" he exclaimed with avidity. "Is there something big on down at headquarters that the inspector has been after asking you to lend a hand on? There's been nothing in the papers, barring hold-ups, that would make Dick Turpin blush like an amateur."

"If there was, you'd never know it. After you've satisfied yourself that the championship is still safe for democracy and the G'ants aren't developing sleeping sickness, the news of the day is finished for you," McCarty observed with fine scorn. "As for my resignation from the force, I'll have you to know that it's been temporarily handed back to me, and that fellow out at Homevale can toot away till he's black in the face, for all I care! I'm back on the job again."

"What is it, Mac?" Dennis's tone was sepulchral from suppressed excitement. "Why didn't you let me know? I was off last night—"

"I didn't know it myself till I nabbed a young second-story worker coming out of the window of one of those grand houses across the park, quicker than ever he went in, and learned what he found there. 'Twas the body of the owner, him they used to call 'Million-a-Month' Creveling along Broadway, with a hole in his breast and a .44 beside him."

McCarty detailed his nocturnal experience, and Dennis listened with bated breath to the point where, while the search of the upper rooms by his crony and Inspector Druet was progressing, the shadow had appeared behind them on the staircase. Then he could contain himself no longer.

"Holy Mother!" he ejaculated. "Was it a ghost or the murderer himself, do you think, Mac?"

"Whoever it was, 'twas no ghost, Denny, as you'll see later," McCarty averred. "The drawers of the desk in the housekeeper's room were locked, and when I lifted the end and shook it I could hear something heavy, like books, sliding around inside; I noticed, too, that the locks themselves were rusty. Mind that. There were no keys in the room, though we looked everywhere, so the inspector and I beat it down to the study once more, where Clancy was waiting with the dicks from borough headquarters.

"They all said they hadn't been back up-stairs again, and the inspector kidded me about hearing things, but I couldn't get the thought of that shadow out of my mind, and as soon as I could I slipped away and up to Creveling's room once more; the sound that I thought I'd heard when we were on the upper floor seemed to come from there.

"Everything looked just the same as when we had left it, but when I went over to have a second look at the little drawer with the spring lock in the desk there were new marks on it overlaying those our fingers had made; whoever had followed us wore gloves, as you could see plain from the oil the desk had been rubbed up with. Ghosts don't wear gloves, Denny."

"Then who—"

"I went over the same ground from room to room that I'd been through with the inspector only a few minutes before; but I didn't find anything else till I came to the housekeeper's room again," McCarty continued, unheeding the interruption. "The locks on the desk there were shiny and dripping with fresh oil, and, when I lifted it, it was lighter and nothing slid around inside.

"Somebody had slipped up behind us and opened the drawers of both the desks, taking out whatever was inside—somebody who knew how to work that spring lock. I didn't find hide nor hair of him, though, and I'd upset and broke a bottle of perfumery in Mrs. Creveling's room, bad luck to it! When I got back down to the

study Clancy sniffed it on me, and I doubt that I've lost the smell of it yet!"

He went on, telling of the arrival of George Alexander, the valet Hill, his own discovery of the blood-stained card thrust under the tapestry on the table and the return of Mrs. Creveling and finally the cook and butler.

"And all you've got to go on," Dennis summed up for him, "is the bit of amber mouth-piece the other man had smoked with, the lone card, and the marks of gloved fingers on the desk up-stairs."

"Not quite. I'm asking myself a lot of questions, Denny, for there's more in a look sometimes or a chance word than in all the finger-prints in the world. For instance, what's there between that valet and Mrs. Creveling's uncle, George Alexander? They tried their best to slip away for a little confab together, but I kept my eye on them; there's something they both know, and each of them were afraid that the other would let it out.

"Why did that valet Hill say he had just 'returned' and correct it to 'arrived'? If he had nothing to conceal either on his own account or on Creveling's, why did I have to drag out of him the little I learned? Why wouldn't he tell where he'd been all night?

"When the inspector asked him if he knew Creveling was coming to his house last evening, 'twas on the tip of his tongue to deny it when he remembered that he'd taken the things from the caterer's men himself for the supper, and they'd say so if they were questioned. It's plain, of course, that Creveling got rid of all the servants for the night, so that none of them should see who his company was; but I've an idea that Hill knows, all the same."

"You don't think"—Dennis chose his words with evident care—"you don't think maybe it was a lady he had to supper, and she shot him after in a fit of jealousy?"

"With a .44 that has a kick to it like an army mule?" McCarty snorted. "Inspector Druet asked Hill if Creveling ever entertained ladies in his home during his wife's absence, and the valet said no, that they were strictly stag suppers, and he didn't seem any too anxious to give the

names of any of the gentlemen who'd been present. He said they just ate and drank and smoked and chinned, with never a little game to while away the hour; that Creveling hadn't touched a card in years."

"Then how did that nine of diamonds come to be there on the table?" demanded Dennis.

There was a pause, and then McCarty replied slowly:

"I don't know, unless it was a part some way of the grim game that was played out to a finish between the two of them in the study after supper."

"A game of life and death, with Creveling losing the odd trick." Dennis nodded. "If you did not find the rest of the pack lying around, maybe the one card was brought by the man that killed him as a sign or a reminder. Oh, you needn't be looking at me like that, Mac! Stranger things than that are going on behind those white-marble fronts, for all you know! But what was that high blank wall built for at the back?"

"That's one of the questions I've been asking myself, like I told you." McCarty cocked his ear at a newsboy's shrill call down the street and shook his head. "No. It'll be too early for the papers to get hold of it yet. It's funny how they were all so sure, even his wife, that Creveling had been murdered, and him with the pistol lying beside him. It was only when Mrs. Creveling spoke of calling in Terhune that her uncle backslid and pretended that he thought it might have been suicide, after all."

"Terhune!" Dennis exclaimed. "For the love of the saints, is he in on this, too?"

"With both feet, and I misdoubt a couple of his little scientific recording machines up his sleeve," McCarty chuckled. "'Twould have done you more good than a drop of the best to have seen his face when I came back after talking to the cook and butler and found him in the hall!"

"So 'twas Mrs. Creveling called him in, and her uncle didn't want him." Dennis was slowly digesting the facts. "Do you think this Alexander and the valet were in cahoots? It looks as though the both of

them were trying to shield somebody, all right."

"I don't understand the attitude of the whole lot of them." McCarty shook his head once more. "From the minute Mrs. Creveling put her foot in the house there seemed to be a kind of a silent battle going on between her and her uncle; you could feel it in the air. He was trying to run the whole affair to suit himself, and she was defying him, and getting her own way, too, in the end. Say, Denny, there was a fire in the neighborhood last night, wasn't there?"

Dennis stared.

"Sure, what night isn't there, with the people packed in flats like sardines in a box? But what are you getting at, Mac?"

"When was the fire, and where?"

"Along about two, on the next block," Dennis replied. "An upset kerosene stove started it in a dressmaker's place on the ground floor, where she was working late, and it spread to the basement before we could get it under control, but it didn't get up-stairs, though the tenants were pretty well smoked out. How did you know about it?"

"That's where the butler's sister, Mrs. Carroll, lives; where he and his wife spent the night." McCarty drew a cigar from his pocket and chewed the end ruminatively. "They're queer birds. The cook would have talked, I'm thinking, but her husband shut her up—though, at that, I caught them in one lie."

"Before Sarah got sight of me standing behind Hill, she said to him that she wished Mr. Creveling would have his parties somewhere else and leave them in peace, but when I told them Creveling had been shot the butler denied that either of them knew he expected any one last night. In the next breath after Sarah learned that Mrs. Creveling had already come home she bewailed that the rooms were not in order and she had all the lobster and stuff from the caterer's to clean up."

"How did she know there'd been lobster for supper if she hadn't heard the order given? Of course, all this has nothing to do with the murder itself, but knowing so much, it wouldn't surprise me if they knew

or at least suspected who Creveling's guest was that night."

"Then what are they shielding him for? Blackmail?" Dennis's gray eyes snapped with interest. "From what you've told me of them, Mac, 'twould hardly be loyalty would keep them quiet; you'd think they each of them had a fish to fry, by the looks of it!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHADOW ON THE STAIRS.

MCCARTY darted a quick glance at his companion. "True for you, Denny, and I'm wondering if maybe this fellow Hill isn't trying deliberately to draw our fire by refusing to tell where he spent the night, meaning to collect privately from somebody for creating the diversion. Rollins and Sarah are easy to handle, but that valet is away above his job, and he's been with Creveling since his bachelor days—probably knows more about him than any one else in the world. If we could only find the way to make him talk—"

"What about Mrs. Creveling?" interrupted Dennis suddenly. "From what you say, she took the news as cool as a cucumber. Now, I don't pretend to know anything about the workings of a woman's mind, not being a damned fool, but it don't seem natural like for her not to scream nor faint nor raise some sort of a ruction."

"I don't know." McCarty held a match to his cigar and then flipped it into the gutter. "She's a determined woman and a strong one, and she's got her own suspicions all right, but she knows she can't prove anything by herself; that's why she called in the biggest man in his line she ever heard of—Terhune. She'll waste no time keening the dead till she's caught the one that killed him—that is, if there's any grief in her heart."

"If there isn't, why should she be so anxious to get revenge on the murderer?" asked Dennis.

"Well, if there's one thing—that's stronger than grief, it's hate, Denny, and

I'm thinking Mrs. Creveling, for all her gentle ways, would be a good hater. We got more than a hint from her uncle's testimony that there might have been a commercial angle to that marriage, and every one but him is willing to admit that Creveling was no saint, neither before nor after, though her friends don't think she's been on to his philandering."

"Her friends'?" Dennis repeated.

"Sure. I had a little talk with one of them just now at the Belterre Hotel, the husband of the lady she's been staying with down on Long Island."

He described his interview with Douglas Waverley and the corroboration of his alibi over the telephone by Samuel Venner, and Dennis whistled.

"So that's the kind of a bird Creveling's been traveling with, is it? Fat and flashy and going to 'con' men's parties on the side! That crowd can't be the real thing in spite of their money, Mac, take it from me. What show was it you said the girls at the supper came from?"

"The 'By-By Baby' company." McCarty glanced again at his companion. "Why? Is it show-girl's that's interesting you now, at your time of life?"

The sarcasm passed unnoticed over Dennis's hard head.

"It is not," he responded equably. "And as to my time of life, I'll have you remember I'm younger than you by a year!"

"Eleven months," McCarty protested. "But what about the show?"

"Nothing, only Terry Burns's daughter is in it; Beatrice, the little one. He was telling me only the other day that there was no holding her back. She calls herself 'Trixie' now, and threw over Eddie Kirby, that's well fixed in the ice business, for what she speaks about as a 'career.' Terry's as fine a fellow as ever promoted a fight in Harlem, and I'd hate to think of little Bea at a party like the one Venner gave."

"I mind Terry and the family, though 'tis years since I've seen any of them," McCarty observed meditatively. "If 'twas a daughter of mine—"

"'Tis no daughter of either of us, thanks

be!" Dennis ejaculated devoutly. "So you got nothing out of this Waverley, except that there was another woman in the case with Creveling?"

"That, and a flash at his cigarette-case," McCarty rose. "I'll be getting on downtown now; I want to go home and clean up and see a couple of people before I report to the inspector."

"I'm off duty at six," Dennis announced wistfully. "If so be you want me—"

"I'll give you a ring," McCarty promised. "Terhune and Inspector Druet and me being in this already, we might as well make a quartet of it, like old times. Have you got a dress suit?"

Dennis eyed him askance.

"I have not, and never another will I hire after the one I rented for Molly's wedding! It might have been the stuff they used to clean it with, but then again it mightn't, and I'm taking no more chances—"

"Never mind; I've none myself," McCarty said hurriedly. "You'll hear from me before six."

He strode off toward the modest bachelor quarters which he occupied over the antique shop of M. Girard, but upon reaching his own corner he halted abruptly. On the step leading to the apartment entrance stood an exceedingly long-legged young man who twirled his hat on the head of his cane. His red head glowed brazenly in the sun and he looked up with a boyish grin as McCarty advanced reluctantly.

"Hello, there, Mac! I thought you'd show up for a shave and a clean collar now that you're moving in society. If I had your luck in falling over news I'd be city editor by now. What's the good word in the Creveling case?"

"There's none," McCarty retorted as Jimmie Ballard, most ubiquitous of reporters, prepared uninvited to ascend with him to his rooms. "Creveling was found dead with the gun beside him; that's the long and short of it. You'd better be seeing the inspector—"

"Not a chance in the world, and you know it!" Jimmie laughed. "Come, now, Mac, be a sport! We've got the obituary salted down at the shop, of course, but I've

got to have a double column for the first edition of the afternoon rag. Usual stall at the house: Mrs. Creveling prostrated, couldn't see any one, and had nothing to say for publication.

"All I know is that you and Officer Clancy nabbed a burglar creeping out of the house and, investigating, found Creveling's body. Of course, you're retired from the force, and you've nothing to do with the investigation, and you're only a private citizen drawn by your own curiosity into the case?"

"You've got me right, my lad," McCarty threw the butt of his cigar out into the middle of the street and turned to insert his latch-key into the door.

"Well, then, you old fraud," Jimmie made his point gleefully, "there's no reason why you can't give me your private opinion! Do you think that young crook shot Creveling?"

McCarty sighed, and then his eyes twinkled with sudden inspiration.

"There's no getting away from you, Jimmie! Come on up if you want to; it's no good denying that I'm interested in the case, for all I'm a back number, and my curiosity that you were talking about is still working. You started in as a society reporter, didn't you?"

"Uhuh," Jimmie admitted as they went up the stairs. "I'd rather do the sob-sister stuff any day. But what about that gangster you caught crawling out of the window?"

"Is he a gangster?" McCarty asked cautiously.

"Surest thing you know—one of the Lexington Avenue Blackjacks, though he's only a kid. What little nerve he had is gone, and he's bleating down at headquarters now that it was the first job he ever tackled and he only did it to prove to the rest of the gang that he was as good as any of them. He declares he found Creveling dead on the floor and that you can swear to it. How about it, Mac?"

"Well, there was no silencer on the gun we saw lying beside the body, and the one I found on the crook when I frisked him was loaded to the full," McCarty replied slowly, weighing each word. "I saw the

fellow just ahead of me on the avenue skulking to the house and getting through the window, and I waited outside for him, but I didn't hear any shot. Come till I shave; I've little time to spare, for I've got to catch the eleven-thirty train to Homevale, to evict one of my tenants."

Jimmie grinned again at the palpable mendacity, but followed and perched himself on the foot of the bed where he could view the bath-room through the opened door.

"You're a busy little landlord, aren't you?" he jeered good-naturedly. "Did you see anything while you waited under the window?"

"Nothing but the legs of my young friend Bodansky coming out faster than ever he went in, and I didn't have long to wait, either; not more than three minutes." McCarty paused to draw the razor along the line of his square jaw, and then turned. "That obituary you've got set up will be good reading if it goes back to the days when Creveling was known as Million-a-Month along Broadway."

"I was a cub then, but I remember him and the crowd he trailed with," Jimmie remarked. "Didn't see much of him at society crushes until his engagement to Miss Alexander was rumored."

"She's a fine-looking woman," McCarty turned again to his task. "Are they a grand family, the Alexanders?"

"Good blood in them; old stock, but it's run to seed. The money went, too, during the past generation or so, and old George Alexander helped it along with a lot of fool speculations. He must have been very nearly at the end of his rope when Creveling married his niece and put him on his feet again."

"What do you know about the set they've been going with?" McCarty spoke with studied carelessness. "The Waverleys, and Fords, and a man named Nicholas Cutter, and this Mrs. Ballie Kip, of East Sixty-Third Street? I can't recall all the names I have heard mentioned in connection with them."

"You heard an earful," Jimmie assured him. "They're a pretty swift bunch, but all well connected, and there's never been

any actual scandal about any of them. The Douglas Waverleys are all right financially, though he's a rotter, and, like Creveling, his wife comes of a far better family than he.

"If by the Fords you mean Lonsdale Ford and his wife, they're climbers; never heard of until a few years ago, when he bought a seat on the Exchange. It is a mystery how they managed to get into that set, especially on a footing with Nicholas Cutter, for he's a dyed-in-the-wool aristocrat."

"What does he do for a living?" McCarty asked.

"Nothing, though he is an honorary director of half a dozen banking institutions. His father left him millions, but he doesn't seem to care much for society beyond a small circle of intimate friends, and he never entertains on a large scale, though he could have the smartest people in town about him if he liked." Jimmie stood up and thrust his hands in his pockets. "See here, Mac, I'm no walking Blue Book! You've seen Mrs. Creveling; what did she say? How did she act? Had she been notified of her husband's death before she arrived?"

"Wait a bit," McCarty admonished. "You haven't told me about this Mrs. Kip yet. Who is she?"

Jimmie shrugged.

"Nobody knows. Widow of a Western mining man, I've heard. She blew into town about six or seven years ago, rented a big house, and went in for charity—the old short cut to social position, you know. It didn't work, in her case, and after vainly knocking at the portals for two or three seasons she dropped out of sight, only to reappear last autumn in the Crevelings' set, but the Lord knows how she got there.

"Now, come across, Mac: give me the straight dope. You talked with old Alexander, or at least you must have been there when Inspector Druet questioned him, for the report says that he was the first of the family to appear on the scene after the discovery of the body."

McCarty complied and, with certain mental reservations, gave his young friend a sketchy account of what had taken place,

omitting all reference to the mysterious telephone messages which had summoned George Alexander and Mrs. Creveling, as well as his own discoveries and conclusions. It satisfied Jimmie Ballard, however, and he crowed exultantly.

"Oh, boy! That 'll be some scoop if I get down to the shop in time! Thanks, Mac—I'll do as much for you some day."

At the door McCarty halted him.

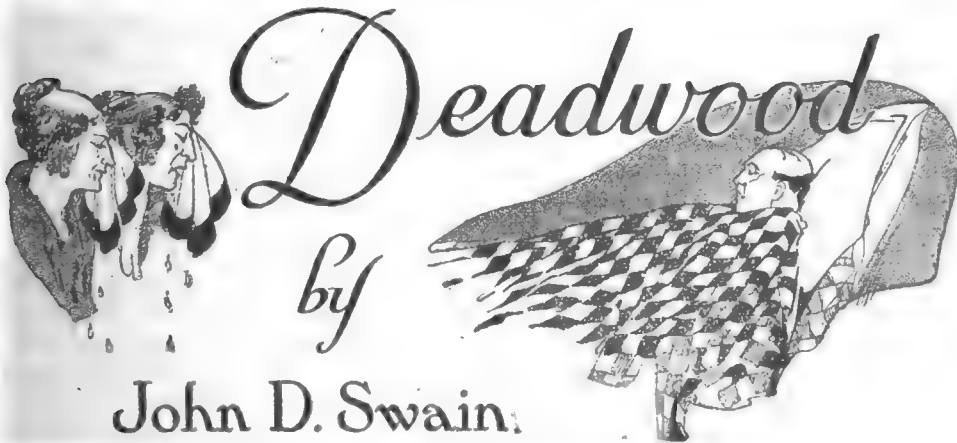
"One second, Jimmie. Every gang has a leader, and I misdoubt but it's the same

in society as down on the docks. Who was the head of the Creveling crowd? Himself?"

Jimmie Ballard shook his head.

"No. Usually a woman is the center of any social clique, and Mrs. Creveling has been mentioned more often and more prominently than any of her immediate friends, but that is because of the position her family have held for so long. I think the real leader of their crowd is Nicholas Cutter."

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.



MISS LETTY wept continuously, her thin shoulders shaking, her dainty cambric handkerchief soggy with the tears she had wiped unavailingly from her pretty, withered-rose cheeks.

She had cried at least weekly for nearly three score years; but Dr. Knapp, who had inherited the Pritchetts along with the rest of his father's practise, had never before seen tears in the eyes of the older sister, Miss Hetty. He was stirred by them more than by the childlike grief of the weaker sister.

"It's an outrage!" he rumbled. "Your brother is an impostor!"

Letty dried her eyes once more as well as she could with her crumpled ball of moist cambric.

"He—he is s-so heavy!" she quavered. "He says he is p-p-perfectly helpless and can't use his muscles."

"If you two women keep on lifting him

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around about six months longer, you'll lose the use of *yours*!"

Miss Hetty spoke in a dry, unemotional voice which had in its prime been the sweetest soprano of the old meeting-house choir.

"We wish to be just; isn't there really anything the matter with Elmer?"

"There is," admitted Dr. Knapp. "He has a very serious and usually incurable disease known as *encephalitis lethargica*."

"Oh!" said Letty, in an awed whisper, "Really! Is it as bad as that?"

"It is as bad as it sounds—and its English name is *chronic laziness*."

The country practitioner enjoys exceptional advantages. He not only knows the life history of his patients from the cradle, but he also knows that of their forbears. He knows that gout "runs" in the Brown blood, and pulmonary ills in the Hicks; that the Jenneys are inclined to be hypo-

chondriac, and that four of them have committed suicide since they settled in Pepperill in 1720, while half a dozen more have been "odd," two at least enough so as to end their days in an asylum. Where the local practise has also descended from father to son, the data is so complete that diagnosis becomes almost an exact science; and when a villager dies before attaining four score years, there is a strong suspicion that Providence has removed him in his prime for inscrutable reasons of its own.

The middle-aged man who sat between the two sisters in the front parlor, knew all there was knowable about their family connections, physiques, religious views, dispositions, financial condition, ability as housekeepers, and what they read.

His frosty blue eyes, as penetrating as a mariner's from his thousands of miles cross-country in pitch dark, scorching sun, howling gale, and starlight, lingered on the familiar objects in the room without seeing them. Yet he could have listed them all unhesitatingly, since he had beheld them so many times. The hit-or-miss center rug; the shiny brass fire-irons and candlesticks; the dull red mahogany; the big Bible, its gold tarnished; a peacock feather in a blue and white vase; seven assorted Pritchetts hanging on the wall in every medium from oil to charcoal, but one and all wearing a fixed stare, as if hypnotized and given a very unpleasant suggestion.

Instead of thinking of them, his mind ran back to Elmer, the brother who had returned to the old Pritchett place the previous fall, after years of wandering. It would not be strictly accurate to call him the *black sheep* of the family; white elephant is much the better term. A husky man of fifty, Jack of all trades, he could readily get a job in any town or city; but his indolent habits always kept him from holding one.

He had unquestionably been run down when he turned up with the rusty valise stuffed untidily with the soiled linen of several weeks, and the tools of many trades; a slow fever had taken many pounds of his overweight. His two old sisters readily forgot all the trouble he had made as a boy, and that he had used up his share of

the patrimony. After Dr. Knapp had reduced the fever, and his appetite returned; they stuffed him with the wholesome and palatable food they knew so well how to prepare. They were not even conscious of any sense of duty; their spinster hearts glowed with love, and the recollection of Elmer as a pretty, chubby little brother, who refused to study his school lessons and wheedled them into helping him do his share of the family chores.

For the first time Elmer found his ideal realized. He lay in a feather bed, ate prodigiously, outraged the maidenly Pritchett noses with the reek of his old cuddy pipe, read a little, slept much. Fat returned to his bones. Outside, the snow lay deep on field and road. Inside, the wood fire crackled soothingly—every room in the house had its fireplace—and there was no tyrannical boss to set him to shingling roofs, painting barns, mending harness, digging wells, or setting dull saw blades.

Strongly suspicious that his patient was shamming, Dr. Knapp had this opinion confirmed by Dr. Robbins, from Winchendon. Thereupon he was exceedingly angry. He was an overworked man, and detested calls from people who merely fancied or liked to pretend they were ill. He could not resist the gentle insistence of the Pritchett sisters that he continue his visits, nor could he afford to take the two-mile drive from the village for nothing. He hated to see the slender substance of the women wasted, because they had watched with his sick in that nurseless countryside, had spent themselves freely in doing good. Above all else, he hated to see Elmer succeed in his mean stratagem to hold a soft berth.

Thinking of this while his restless eyes passed unheeding over the homely adornments of the front parlor, and came to rest abstractedly upon the little cambric wisp soaked with Letty's virgin tears, a sudden inspiration came to him.

The best of his prescriptions were not dispensed from the fat black bag resting between his square-toed boots. He believed in powerful and devastating drugs when medicine was indicated—loved to see results; but his experience had enriched

him with a fund of practical psychology based on a profound, if circumscribed knowledge of human nature—in and around Pepperill. With characteristic energy, no sooner did the great idea come into being than he proceeded to put it in operation. He leaned forward, a broad, capable hand on each knee.

"Listen!" he began abruptly.

For five minutes he talked in fluent, jerky idioms, interrupted from time to time by faint gasps or shocked protests from one or another of the Pritchett girls.

When he had finished, the two looked uncertainly at each other. Letty's tears had dried. A decided flush made Miss Hetty's thin face almost pretty. She was the first to speak.

"Do you really mean he is to be—we are to—that is—"

"He's dead!" Dr. Knapp barked. "You know how to act. You've been in enough houses of mourning. Just think of Elmer—and treat him—as if he was in the Great Beyond—wherever that is! If he is obstinate, remember nothing in the world will do him so much good as to fast for a few days. I, sha'n't come near you—no use to send—for three days. If he's still holding out then, we'll try something else. But it's my guess he won't be!"

The cheery jingle of the doctor's departing sleigh-bells was still audible when the Pritchett sisters went into executive session with Nancy Hines, their hired help, a gaunt, gray haired woman of a very even temper—since she was always grouchy. For the past few months her grouchiness had been directed against brother Elmer, and incidentally against the sisters who let themselves be buncoed by him. With all her shrewdish temper, she adored them, tyrannized over them, and during the thirty years of her employment always sat with them at table, and in their square box pew on the Sabbath. She came of worthy Pepperill stock, and lost no caste whatever by her humble occupation.

Laughter was rare with her, but a harsh cackle of delight broke from her lips when, after wiping her red, bony hands upon her apron, she heard the plan Dr. Knapp had induced the two spinsters to adopt. They

were by no means devoid of a sort of dry, subtle humor peculiar to the remote countryside; and joined in a discreet, ladylike way in Nancy's rude mirth. The sounds penetrated to the guest chamber above, where the chief character in the impending play reposed in fat content, digesting a bountiful dinner while the westering sun embraced him with warmly comforting arms.

He opened his heavy eyes, and decided that it was time for an afternoon smoke. Knocking out the dottle from his black pipe upon the glossy mahogany surface of the little table beside him, he sucked at the worn stem, and found it plugged.

There was a broom in the room, but it stood primly aloof in the far corner, by the bureau; and Elmer had not, unaided, risen from bed for close on three months now. Were he to call out, one or the other of his old sisters would hurry up-stairs at once, and—with veiled disapproval—pluck a stiff straw from the broom, so that he could clean his foul pipe. He knew this well enough—had often called upon them for matters as trivial; yet he hesitated.

His hearing was excellent. He could not make out what they were talking about, but he could identify the laughter of all three. There was the genteel indulgence of Hetty, the lighter, more frivolous, but equally discreet note of Letty. Above them rose the raucous tones of the odious Nancy Hines, whom he detested, and who detested him. She refused not only to enter his room on any pretext whatever, but even to cook any dish exclusively for him. She could not decline to make bread and bake meats a portion of which—an undue portion—found its way to his stomach, but she could and did refuse to prepare beef tea, dropped eggs, milk shakes, and other delicacies designed for him alone.

Elmer felt a certain satisfaction in the laughter which came to his ears from below. Like most selfish people, he greatly preferred to have those about him contented, because it made things smoother for him. He would not take the trouble to make others happy, but was rather glad when some one else did. Satisfied that all the occupants of the house were accounted

for, and that no one could spy upon him, he sat up in bed, threw back the coverings, and rose with surprising agility for a man of his years and weight, let alone one who had lost all use of his muscles.

Pattering noiselessly across the floor in his bare feet, white and clean from the daily scrubbing given them by his sisters, he secured the splint he needed and returned to bed. No untoward accident marred this little adventure. He did not bump into a chair, nor set up the broom so clumsily that it would fall down and startle those below stairs. Two minutes later he was puffing away contentedly, after having stuck the broomsplint under the mattress.

His mind dwelt with pleased anticipation upon his coming supper. He was to have a thick, juicy steak, with lots of fried potatoes. The Pritchetts always lived well, but beefsteak rarely appeared upon their table. It was considered almost sinful extravagance to buy it when there were so many cheaper, equally nourishing dishes available. But he had asked for it, and the grocer had delivered it that afternoon.

When he had exhausted this theme, he reached under the mattress and drew out a worn leather wallet. From it he took a thickish pad of dirty bank-notes, which he counted with relish, although he knew perfectly well that it contained three hundred and twenty dollars. Elmer never had been a spendthrift, save of time. His sisters knew nothing of this hoard; they supposed that the ten or twelve dollars in his trouser-pocket represented his wealth.

He replaced the wallet, laid his pipe on the little mahogany table, and closed his eyes. Presently his loose and flabby mouth opened, and a gentle snore escaped. He slept peacefully until Hetty entered with his steak and potatoes, sizzling hot under a pewter cover. Letty followed with tea, toast, and barberry jelly.

While he ate, the sisters chatted. They always did this, and from time to time Elmer interjected a remark, if his mouth was not too full. Sometimes he did anyhow. Usually the talk was inconsequential; harmless village gossip, "do-you-remember" of events in childhood, or when their parents had been in their primes, inquiries

as to his enjoyment of the meal they had prepared so carefully, and the like. To-night—he gave it little thought at the time—a more somber note crept in.

"I always think, sister," said the elder, "that some day we shall sit down to our last meal together. That is why, when I feel tired, and like sort of scraping something together most anyhow, I always say to myself: 'this *may* be the last meal I shall ever get!' And how sorry I should be if I hadn't taken pains with it."

"You wouldn't know," commented the practical Elmer between two mouthfuls of fried potato. "Not if I understand what you're driving at."

Letty sighed.

"How wise a provision it is that we don't even know! We should be miserable all the time; for of course there'd be a last time for everything else, too; going to church, lacing our shoes, making over a bonnet, or letting out the cat at night."

Miss Hetty refused to be turned aside.

"I said to-night when I fried this nice steak, 'now I'm going to do this just as well as I know how, as if it really was the last meal I'd ever cook for Elmer.' And I put on a clean napkin, though the one he had this noon was hardly rumpled."

"Well, you needn't worry about this being my last meal!" Elmer grunted, not quite enjoying the topic.

"One never knows," Hetty solemnly averred. "But Dr. Knapp says a sick man never stands still; either he gets better, or he grows worse and dies."

"Knapp is an old fogey! I'll live to 'tend his funeral."

Neither sister replied immediately. Finally Letty timidly suggested that unless Elmer got back the use of his legs she didn't see for her part how he'd be able to attend anybody's funeral but his own. As there was no obvious answer to this, conversation languished, and Elmer thought no more of it that night nor in his dreams.

He awoke next morning with the pleasant odor of home-cured bacon intriguing his nostrils. He felt no premonition that this day was to be different from any other—save that he had asked Hetty to dress a chicken and fricassee it for his dinner. But

his ears, accustomed to all the house noises, noted the faint clatter that meant washing up the breakfast dishes. This surprised him, because his own breakfast was always served before the others ate. At the same time, feeling a little cold, his eyes turned toward the fireplace. The embers were banked each night beneath a layer of ashes; and before he awakened, one of his sisters would tiptoe in, rake out the live coals, and put on fresh birch sticks, which would be crackling cozily while he breakfasted in bed. This morning, only cold, dead ashes littered the hearth. He reached under his pillow and consulted his watch. It was nearly eight o'clock.

Indignation kindled within his breast. Unable to understand this sudden forgetfulness on the part of his faithful servitors, he drew the log-cabin quilt closer about his chin, and whiled away the time by thinking up sarcastic comments to utter when the delinquents should finally appear.

This form of mental repartee soon palled on him. Elmer had a healthy appetite, not having tasted food since the night before. He was about to raise his voice in angry summons, when he heard light footsteps on the back stairs. He settled back, ready to meet abashed explanations with one or the other of the ironic phrases he had devised for the occasion.

The footsteps pattered down the hall, accompanied by subdued dialogue; and an instant later Miss Hetty, followed by Letty, entered his room.

To his astonishment, neither of them bore anything to eat. No gold and white eggs on hot buttered toast; no curly, crispy strips of bacon; no potent coffee with its attendant pitcher of thick yellow cream. Nor did either sister so much as glance at him.

This attitude upset his system, which was based upon the natural expectation that they would express contrition for their neglect; whereupon he would reply briefly and cuttingly. He remained silent, his angry eyes fixed upon them.

Letty went to a window and gazed drearily out.

"I can't realize that he is no longer with us!" she sighed.

The older sister coughed dryly.

"One always has that feeling in a room where somebody has recently died. After a time it passes away. I never feel it now in any of the other rooms, and somebody has died in every one of them, at one time or another."

"How glad I am he could end his days at home, among his own folks, instead of in some city boarding-house with unfeeling strangers around him!"

"Yes, it is a great comfort to think he was laid out by neighborly hands instead of a hired undertaker. And how he seemed to relish his last meal! Do you remember what pains I took to have that steak done just as he always liked it?"

"And how nicely I browned the potatoes?"

"Poor Elmer! He was a great sufferer at the last. Do you think, Hetty, that he was resigned? That his soul has gone to—that it is—"

"I don't have to decide that. God is just, and will make allowances. You know mother, when she took to her bed for the last time, told us always to be tender to Elmer. 'He ain't quite all there!' were her very words. He won't be judged like other men who have all their faculties."

Elmer listened in speechless indignation to this dialogue, as his sisters moved aimlessly about the room, setting back a chair here, picking up a thread from the floor, straightening the candlesticks on the mantel. Before he could grasp the amazing fact that he was cast for the rôle of the departed, they gently passed from the room, closing the door behind them.

No sooner had their footsteps echoed down the hall, than he was seized with a frenzy of energy. Grasping a heavy cane which stood at the head of his bed, he pounded furiously upon the floor with it, this being his summons at such rare times as his voice failed to evoke an immediate response.

The racket he made was considerable. The sisters, now descending the stairs, paused. Letty pressed a handkerchief to her lips, and trembled violently. Even Hetty turned a little paler than usual. But the grim Nancy, in the kitchen below,

showed her yellow fangs, and gazing at the ceiling, shook a gnarled fist at it.

"Pound, ye old devil!" she muttered. "Much good may it do ye."

The floor timbers of the Pritchett house were solid, the planks hand hewn and well over two feet wide. In a modern house or apartment, Elmer might have made quite a ruction; have sent flakes of kalsomine down, jarred vases from their place, rattled glasses on their shelves. Here, his frantic pounding was futile, and soon died away in intermittent taps as his arm tired. Silence descended upon the house.

He was no fool. He was greatly surprised, having had no inkling that his sisters were growing tired of waiting upon him; but he realized that they were trying to force his hand—or rather his legs—by withholding his meals until he got up and came down-stairs for them. Well—he'd show them! He disposed his limbs as comfortably as possible and tried to go asleep again.

He had slept his fill, however. Besides, his brain was active with resentment, and above all he was hungry. His overeating created a false desire, so that he seemed to be even hungrier than he really was. His meals had been served regularly as clock-work.

Half an hour later his sisters entered a second time. He had not heard them until the door opened. He noticed for the first time that they were dressed in black.

"I want my victuals!" he bawled, before they were fairly within the room. "What you think you're doing, anyhow?"

Neither answered him, nor indeed looked his way. Letty, however, spoke to her elder.

"I feel as if he were right here now," she breathed. "As if he might speak out loud, any minute."

Hetty did not reply, but went directly to the fireplace. She carried a tin pail, and Elmer watched her curiously. First laying down an old newspaper, she carefully spread her black silk skirt and knelt down, and began to shovel the cold ashes into the pail. When she had finished, she swept and garnished the hearth carefully with a turkey wing.

As she rose and lifted her pail, a black cat entered the room. He marched up to the bed, and with the light, effortless grace of his kind, leaped upon it.

Elmer did not like cats very well. Now he did not like anybody or anything.

"Scat!" he yelled, striking at the animal, which, its tail swelling, sprang to the floor and rushed from the room.

"Did you notice how queer old Hetty acted, Hetty? Just as if he saw something invisible to our eyes."

"They say cats can sense things we mortals can't. Grandma used to say that this house was haunted, a cat could always tell. And you know how we always keep the door locked out when there's a body in the house."

Following the cat, the sisters left the room, which was by now quite chilly.

"When you going to stop this blamed foolishness and git me something to eat? Want me to starve to death, or git pneumonia, or—"

The door closed on Elmer's unfinished sentence. He thumped his pillow viciously and resumed his watchful waiting.

Never had a day passed so slowly in the Pritchett home. The sun seemed to stand still in the heavens, the sharply defined shadows upon the unsullied snow not to lengthen. It seemed that the very clock pendulum hung poised, defying the law of gravitation. Dinner came, and was eaten in a silence broken only by the strident comments of the unfeeling Nancy Hines. No sound of thumping cane issued from the room above, where Elmer lay plotting darkly.

Not one of them went near his chamber that afternoon, and as the sun sank—even though it seemed not to move—the room became colder and colder. In her kitchen, Nancy sang doleful hymns in an excruciating falsetto. The sisters wandered aimlessly about, or sat listlessly by the sitting-room fire, fancy work idle in their hands, the village weekly unread on the table. They spoke seldom, and sighed often.

Neither of them could eat any supper. The thought of the hungry brother lying alone in his cold room kept them from doing more than pick at the fricassée

chicken which had been intended for him. Spurred by the scolding of Nancy, both managed to swallow cups of hot tea, but rebelled at anything more substantial.

Early hours prevailed here. For a little while they sat about the big kerosene lamp, and after Nancy had clumped up-stairs to bed—it had been her weekly ironing day—the sisters lingered a few minutes longer. Letty dampened another cambric handkerchief—her third that day—and sniffed genteelly.

"I—I'm afraid its impious! We're wicked old women, Hetty!"

"Nonsense!"

"To think of him up there alone in his own father's house, in the very room he was born in, and on an empty stomach!"

"Didn't you hear Dr. Knapp say it was the very best thing he could do, to fast?"

"Y-yes—but I know I shall never be able to live through another day like this!"

"Sufficient unto the day, sister! Let us go to bed, and not cross any bridges till we come to them."

Hetty rose, and Letty obediently followed. They let out the black cat, carefully examined all the doors and windows, lighted their bedroom candles, put out the lamp and slowly mounted the stairs, glancing askance at their brother's closed door as they passed it.

In the hall before Hetty's room they kissed each other's withered cheeks as usual, murmured "good night," and popped through their doors like frightened rabbits.

It was only nine o'clock, and within fifteen minutes their simple toilets were unmade, and their candles blown out. Elmer, brooding somberly, having failed to pacify his outraged stomach by many pipefuls of rank tobacco, waited impatiently for fifteen minutes longer before carrying out the plan he had had ample time to perfect. He could not be sure they were asleep, and he knew they had sharp ears; but his necessities demanded an attack upon the enemy base.

He threw back the warm coverings, shuddered a little, thrust his feet into the warm bed shoes knitted by Letty, and slipped his great coat over his flannel night-

shirt. Crossing the room inch by inch in the dark, he noiselessly uncaught the wrought iron latch, opened the door and stepped out into the hall. Feeling his way along the wall, he came presently to the back stairs, and descended without mishap. The woodwork throughout was so substantial that no board creaked, no stair gave warning.

Below, the kitchen felt pleasantly warm. The stove was not yet cold, and the back log in the fireplace gave out not only heat, but enough light to point the way to the pantry-door. Not until he was inside did he venture to light the bit of candle he had borne with him.

Its frail beam revealed a ravishing vision to his hungry eyes. There was a shelf of flaky pies—mince, pumpkin, dried apple, and half a custard. There was part of a boiled ham, with mounds of cabbage and potatoes nestling about its base. The remainder of the fricasseed chicken stood in a blue bowl, a nice rice pudding in a yellow one. A huge pan of milk, thick with unskimmed cream, a cottage cheese, loaves of bread in a tin box, a glazed crock full of doughnuts, and a great pot of baked beans with a noble island of succulent pork, to say nothing of squadrons of jams, jellies, pickles, and preserves—the splendor stunned him momentarily, leaving him unable to decide upon which point to direct his attack.

Only for the moment, however. In ten more the wreck of the larder was pitiful. Gone was the chicken, the cottage cheese, the rice pudding. No longer was the milk-pan richly coated with cream. The gaunt ruin of the hambone thrust upward from the scattered potatoes, the fragments of cabbage. Baked beans littered the shelf, and even the floor.

Elmer's plan looked not alone to the satisfaction of the moment, but to the grim siege of the future. In a clean huckabuck towel he proceeded to store all he could carry up-stairs and hide beneath his bed. When he had finished, he unfastened the pantry window and threw it wide. He scattered some crumbs upon the sill, dropped half a doughnut and a boiled potato outside. It might be that they would

not believe some tramp had ravaged their stores—but at least he'd fix it so they never could disprove it! He blew out his candle, and, bundle in hand, began his return trip.

There was no trouble crossing the kitchen. There was even less in going up the stairs in the dark than in coming down. But Elmer had been away from home for years. On this last visit he had been taken directly to his room, and had not left it until now. There were six sleeping chambers up-stairs, three on each side of the hall which ran straight through the house from front to rear. His own, the guest chamber, was the front one on the west side. Next to it was Nancy Hines's. Nearest the stairs, an empty one, facing another across the hall, the other two being used by Hetty and Letty.

A journey in the dark always seems longer than in the light. To Elmer, inching along the hall in pitch blackness, it seemed that he must have gone even farther than his door; and the latch which his cautious hand touched at length, he accepted without question as his own. It was the portal of Nancy Hines's virgin bower.

Like many people who rasp the nerves of others, Nancy had none of her own. She slept the innocent, untroubled slumber of a hibernating cobra. She did not hear Elmer as he stealthily opened her door and closed it after him. She did not hear him when he knelt by her bed—not in silent prayer, but to thrust far beneath it the forage with which he proposed to withstand a long siege. But when, his stratagem having succeeded as he fondly conceived, he sat down heavily upon the bed, his hundred and ninety pounds causing Nancy's side to shoot up and catapult her spare frame into the air—then she awoke.

The full details of what next took place will never be clearly known. The two sisters, quaking in their beds, heard Nancy's hyenalike yell, and Elmer's calls upon his Maker. They heard furniture crashing, and finally a door being violently slammed and the bureau dragged across the room against it. Nancy herself, seeing nothing, could not have testified accurately. Elmer, who should know better than any one else

what happened to him, often pondered the matter in later years, and finally decided that it would be better to enumerate the few things that *didn't* happen to him. It would save much time!

Upon hearing Nancy's preliminary yell, he was scared nearly out of his wits. He forgot where he was, or even *who* he was. When the dreadful truth dawned upon him he was completely turned around in the dark, and couldn't find the door. It was while he was seeking it that the worst things happened to him. He barked his shins so many times that he lost count. His nose rammed into something that would not yield, so that he tasted sulfur. But what remained his most vivid single impression was the time Nancy hit him a chance blow on the head with a hair-brush, bristle side down. The bristles were of wire; they left ninety-seven tiny punctures in his bald scalp. There may have been a few more; it was hard to count them accurately next day.

All things must have an end. He found himself in the hall a few years later, as it seemed, and still later, in his own bed.

Letty crept chattering into Hetty's room, and spent the remainder of the night with her. From Nancy's room not another sound came. The incident was closed, in her opinion. She went to sleep again. No one else did, save for brief cat naps.

Very early next morning Letty rose and peered out of the window. The east was aflame, turning the snow a faint rose color. Water dripped from the eaves.

After a moment her startled voice roused Hetty, who joined her at the window.

Swinging down the road toward Pepperill was brother Elmer, fully dressed, and bearing his old valise. He limped some, but was making surprisingly good time. Letty began to whimper faintly.

"I c-can't help feeling guilty to think that we let him go out from his own old home on an empty stomach!"

Hetty said nothing, but looked as if she, too, would like to cry.

A little later, when they beheld their pantry, their minds were entirely relieved. Enough for their own simple dinner was salvaged from beneath Nancy Hines's bed.

Beware of the Bride by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Don't Ever Marry," "His Word of Honor," "The Wicked Streak," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

MARY, three months married to William Emerson, was on her honeymoon—but she wasn't entirely happy. Bill had been combining business with honeymooning, and Mary thought that there was too much business in the combination. As she and Bill were to sail for Europe as soon as they reached New York, to be away for a year, she induced her jealous husband to stop off for a few hours in Braydon—where she had been too popular to suit Bill—to say good-bye to her parents—and no others. She was to meet him on the train that passed through Braydon at ten twenty-two the same evening.

While Mary had been away fortune had smiled on the firm of Noble & Henning, the young members of which had been among Mary's most ardent admirers. Peter Noble had taken advantage of these smiles by acquiring a wife, Sally; and his partner soon was to marry Dolly Hayes.

The day of Mary's unexpected visit was also the day of a masquerade ball that was to mark the happy conclusion of a feud that had disrupted Braydon society for a generation. It also happened that Mrs. Peter Noble was away on a short visit; that Mary met no one that she knew on the way from the station; and that when she reached her old home she found no one but old and crusty Uncle Arthur—her parents were away.

Now, of course, Peter and Thomas had given their hearts elsewhere—but from a cousin of Peter's they heard that Mary was in town and called—separately. Peter induced her to attend the ball with him, arranging for her to dress with his sister Nellie in his apartment, and for them to meet him at the ball. He would wear a suit of armor; she would be masked so that no one would recognize her; he would take her to the station in time for her train—and no one but his sister would be the wiser.

The first slip came when the costumer told Peter that his only suit of armor had been hired by some one else. Then as Peter checked Mary's bag at the station he learned that his factory was threatened by a flood, jumped on a train and forgot the presence of women in the world.

Meanwhile Thomas, by promising that he would return it if the man who had engaged it came, had obtained the armor, and thus attired had taken Dolly Hayes to the ball. There an old-fashioned girl had kept close to him, bringing down on his head the anger of his jealous fiancée. The girl was Mary, who was being pestered by a curious cousin of her husband's. When Thomas learned who she was he tried to help her to escape. In a dark room she donned the armor, he becoming a shipwrecked sailor.

Faint from the weight of the armor, Mary decided to change back to her previous costume—but the room was now occupied. Ten o'clock struck and Tom and Mary started for the entrance. There Mary was pounced upon for a prize costume parade and was hauled away, the paraders beating a tattoo on her armor with sticks and swords.

CHAPTER XV.

FIGHTING ON.

YEARS rolled into centuries; centuries into ages; and still Thomas merely stared numbly down the ball-room at the tragedy.

There at the far end the original fiends

had grouped and more people were drifting to them. The insane policeman, having rattled out a tattoo on the knight's breastplate, chanted a "Hear ye!" for a little; and now there seemed to be a lull, during which the coolie was making a speech upon chivalry, its exponents, its effects. It was a considerable speech and it was using

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up minute after minute, yet it seemed to amuse them, for the band had not yet started work again.

Still Thomas merely gazed and—a mighty shock ran through him and brought him back to life at last. What was the matter with him this evening? He had considered himself a person of infinite resource and force, but he had let them take Mary away from him, and now, helpless as any oyster, he was letting them torture her!

A hot flush surged up under Mary's late mask, and young Mr. Henning, with a comment upon his own intelligence that was no less than shameless, bounded forward, down the room and through the crowd, pausing only before the Zulu, who still supported Mary.

"Sorry to break into the fun," he said quickly and as naturally as might be, "but—my friend here—"

"And therefore, friends—say, what's the matter with that shipwrecked sailor?" the coolie demanded, breaking his oration. "Will you please just merge yourself with the merry villagers until I'm through, sailor? King Arthur here's going to make a speech as soon as I finish!"

"I know, but this is business," Thomas said.

"Business with a knight, on this night of all nights, will have to wait."

"It cannot—really," Thomas said firmly. "This is an urgent matter we were just slipping out to discuss when you broke in." He edged the giant Zulu aside and laid a hand upon Mary's limp, swaying arm. "Come, Sam!" said he.

He had recaptured her at last! And there was at least a shred or two of civilization left among them, for they parted rather reluctantly to let the pair pass. Only the aggressive coolie stared down disapprovingly from the stool he had appropriated for a rostrum—and he was disposed of now as, for no obvious reason, the ruddy young Puritan stepped to him and said softly:

"Go right on with the speech! It's funny! Keep on—please!"

One vast sigh of relief escaped Thomas Henning. They were free! Yes, they were free even of the coolie's attentions.

He took a firmer grip upon the uncertain figure and marched it on. She still could walk!

And behind, apparently, some one else could walk and was doing it, to the extent of hurrying after Thomas and his charge. He glanced up swiftly, to find the ruddy Puritan beside them, unsmiling, strangely disturbed.

"Hold on! What Sam is that?" he demanded.

"Eh?" said Thomas.

"Is that Sam Risdon?"

"Certainly!" Thomas said readily.

"And we're in a hurry and—". The Puritan did not even hear. His full mouth opened in plain, undisguised horror.

"Good Lord Almighty!" he gasped.

"And with his heart!"

"What?" said Thomas.

"Hey? You know me, don't you?" the Puritan asked, quickly, and whisked off his mask. "I'm Dr. Leslie and—bring him into one of these smaller rooms."

"He doesn't—"

"Never mind what he wants or doesn't want," the doctor snapped, energetically. "I've been treating that boy for six months and I'd no more idea that he'd try a fool trick like coming here with a thousand pounds of iron on him than that he'd try to fly!"

"Why, he thought—"

"And the way they've been hammering him around and kicking him around—and the racket there must have been inside that damned armor, too!" pursued the medical man, who did not know that he was in the presence of a lady. "Sam, you're nothing but a plain jackass! Upon my word, you are! A plain damned fool!"

"Month after month, bit by bit, I've been trying to build up a nervous structure for you—and you come here in that walking boiler-factory and let them play hell's own tattoo on you!"

Sheer rage caused his big fingers to snap loudly. Thomas contrived a sort of smile.

"He—he—he—he came out of it all right, though, you see," he said. "If you'll just let us get on to the little business talk we're trying to have?"

"Do you suppose for an instant that

man's in shape to talk *business*?" the good doctor rasped. "Are you part of the gang that's trying to kill him? Bring him in here!"

Quite majestically he pointed to the very room they had left such a little while ago. Despite himself, Thomas shuddered slightly.

"Doctor, dear," said he, very quietly. "Will you just cool down? You're angry and you've lost some of that wonderful poise that makes you famous. Sam doesn't need treatment."

"You'll permit me to say what he does need," stated the medical man, and lowered his voice. "He's a kid and one of my pet cases. I wasn't contemplating treatment. I *am* going to give him a mighty thorough examination, quick!"

"Eh?" said Thomas.

"And then send him home in a cab if he's able to travel. How does that helmet come off?"

"It doesn't! It's rivetted to the rest of it," young Mr. Henning said quickly. "Anyway, Sam doesn't want people staring at him. He went to a lot of trouble to get a costume nobody could possibly penetrate."

"Yes, and he's working his way into another one—a wooden one and not an iron one!—that nobody 'll ever try to penetrate" the doctor said bitterly. But he was cooling fast.

Hands on his hips, he addressed the knight himself: "Why don't you speak, Sam?"

"Why should he?" Thomas laughed. "He doesn't want to take the chance of any one hearing him and spotting his voice!"

A frankly wondering Puritan stare turned upon him for an instant, and then back to the knight.

"I know him, don't I?" he said rather blankly. "How do you feel, Sam? All right or all wrong?"

The armor creaked faintly through three fearful seconds; then it nodded assent.

"Does that mean all right? Why don't you talk, Sam? There isn't another person within forty feet just now. Has that pain come on again?"

"No!" came gruffly, astonishingly from the armor.

"That doesn't sound at all like Sam's voice!" the doctor stated.

"He's hoarse!" said Thomas. "And now suppose—"

He stopped. Down the ballroom the band had suddenly returned to life and action, and their first strains had a most peculiar effect upon Dr. Leslie. He scowled; he shut his teeth then.

"Dod blast it to blazes!" he remarked. "You picked a wonderful time for this trick, Sam! This is the dance I'm supposed to waddle through with old Mrs. Wilberforce, and she's the richest thing in my whole list and—"

"Well, don't be a fool; go and dance with her, Leslie!" Thomas urged swiftly.

"Not when this—"

"Doctor, let's cut out the nonsense. Sam's all right. If he isn't, I'll know it in a very few minutes, because we're going to unscrew that vizor when we get into a quiet corner. I give you my solemn word of honor, if I see one thing wrong with Sam Risdon, I'll send for you instantly—dance or no dance."

The band blared on. Across the place, decorated with some fifty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds, a very plump, elderly lady stood all alone.

"Is that a promise?" the doctor choked.

"The solemnest one you ever heard!" said Thomas.

One last, long look at the speechless knight, and the doctor snapped on his mask and plunged away!

Down young Mr. Henning's spine cold trickles ran. He touched the handkerchief that bound his brow; it, too, was very moist.

"Mary!" said he. "We're safe!"

The knight remained speechless still, although from the vizor filtered one wild little gasp.

"Mary, are you all right?" Thomas asked.

"I—I—you let him swear at me!" choked from behind the vizor.

"I—"

"Yes, you did! You let him curse me—me, a girl—when you were standing there!"

"He may not have understood that you were a girl!" Thomas suggested mildly enough.

"That makes no difference at all! *You* understood it and you let him!" Mary panted, and the purely hysterical note in her voice largely explained the train of thought.

"You'll have to forgive me, Mary. Shall we—"

"I'll never forgive you! Never! Never!" came so passionately through the iron slits that young Mr. Henning all but expected to see flame follow the words. "And that isn't the worst! You gave me to them! You gave me, bodily, to that pack!"

"Mary, could I possibly wrestle you away from them by main force? This isn't a bartender's picnic, you know, or a political outing! You can't start a fight when you feel like it at a fashionable gathering."

The panting behind the helmet seemed to increase, rather than to diminish.

"No, but you could have found a way if you'd wanted to find one! You found one quickly enough when it suited your purpose. No, that was your idea of fun! Letting them pound me and throw me around! Fun! *Fun! Fun!*"

"Hush, Mary!" gasped Thomas. "If you want that train—"

He could have produced no greater shock with the policeman's own club. The armor shook suddenly, top to toe, and then grew steady. Inside the helmet, there was an audible gulp—another gasp—a sob.

"Take me—out of here!" Mary moaned.

"Well, don't cry about it!" Thomas virtually snapped, as he moved her on, even again, toward the main entrance. "You'll only attract more attention. Knights didn't weep much and they never planned armor for the kind that did.

"If you're going to shake and rattle like that you—there! Did you see that woman staring at you?"

He summoned his sadly strained smile and moved on. The commotion in the armor subsided somewhat.

"You—dare—abuse me, too!" issued from within it, chokingly. "With all the rest you've done, you dare abuse me! If I—if I could tell Billy Emerson all you've

done to me, do you know what he'd do to you?"

"I do not and I'm not interested," Thomas said acidly. "I've done my best, Mary, and if things have slipped it isn't my fault. Here, by the inscrutable grace of Heaven above, is the door! Are you able to walk through it?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I don't know how it happens, but there isn't a servant or a maniac of a committee member or anything else around at this moment. It looks as if we could walk straight out! We can!" said Thomas.

He quickened his pace a little, causing the armor to stumble. Teeth grinding, he piloted the strange figure across the most magnificent private entrance in Braydon and several adjoining cities—yes, and through the great doorway, too, and now his incredulous ears were actually hearing the gentle click of its latch.

And now, by all that was astounding, hard stone steps were beneath his feet. They passed down both of them and came to a cement walk—and for volume of air expelled, the gasp that came from Thomas Henning equalled at least three of Mary's best!

For they were free!

CHAPTER XVI.

IN HER POCKET.

AFTER all the excitement, all the shocks, all the hair-breadth escapes and everything else, they were past the portal and in the open night. It seemed to Thomas that he had just taken a new lease upon life.

He glanced up and down the still, dark avenue and across to the brilliant, deserted entrance of the Cypria Apartments. If the nightmare had been luck, the luck had turned!

"Careful now, Mary," he cautioned gently. "Those shoes are heavy and—"

"Don't speak to me, please!"

"What?"

"Please!" came coldly from the helmet. "You've done enough!"

"Do you want to go on alone now?"

"Tommy!" cried the bride.

"You know the way and I've done all I can for you. And—er—it might be just as well for me to go back there and find Dolly and—"

"Tommy, you wouldn't be brute enough to desert me now?" Mary breathed shakily.

"I thought you'd prefer—"

"Well, I wouldn't!" Mary cried. "I—I—didn't mean what I said in there, Tommy! I didn't mean a word of it! Only don't leave me out here alone, this way!"

The iron arm was thrust through his own and clung tightly. Thomas favored the helmet with a soothing smile beyond the metal's appreciation.

"I'll stick to the finish, Mary, if you want me," he said. "You know that. Here's the curb. Easy! Are you down? Fine!"

Chauffeurs of near-by cars stared inquiringly at them for a moment, laughed and gave no further heed. Quaint costumes galore had been going in and out of the Thorndyke mansion this evening.

A stray taxicab, given pause by Thomas's rather wildly waving hand, slowed down with all brakes squealing and waited for the slow-moving knight to pass.

But they were making progress! They were across the street now and moving into the very vestibule of the Cypria establishment, and the normally capable mental machinery within the Thomas Henning skull took to working again.

Well, it had been a wild evening, so far! And the wild part was over. Those were the two outstanding facts.

There would be consequences, of course, but since time immemorial chivalrous gentlemen who elected to aid distressed brides of other men have been taking them in vast quantities, and Thomas probably enough would stand the ordeal.

There was Mary's party-gown, for example, hidden somewhere behind the palms in the little conservatory; that would have to be looked after by bribing the Thorndyke servants. There was the matter of Dr. Leslie, which could be turned into a joke, of course. But more than all there was the matter of Dolly Hayes herself, and

that would take some of the liveliest and the most capable-explaining Thomas had ever attempted!

He would get into his armor again, as soon as little Mary was on her way, and dash back to the festivities. He would seek out Dolly and—and then?

At the moment, Thomas was not prepared to say just what would follow. His life's happiness was at stake; whatever followed was likely to be spectacular and tinged with mendacity, but that mattered little enough so that it was efficacious. It was possible that he might totter to Dolly and give his own idea of a man whose memory, lost for an hour, has just returned. Again, he might—

"Oh! Yes, the elevator, of course!" Thomas said, rousing to the affairs of the immediate moment. "Step in—er—Sam!"

The colored boy giggled cheerfully and sleepily as Mr. Henning removed his mask and handkerchief, and took them swiftly to the still, blessed solitude of the fifth floor. Airily, almost, Thomas stepped out and steered his charge from the car—and the door clattered into place again and the car descended and at last, beyond any peradventure, their escape was an accomplished fact. They were walking to Peter's very door.

Before it they stopped.

"Saved!" said the savior.

"Yes—Tom!" issued faintly, weakly, from the helmet.

"Brace up, girl!" Thomas said softly. "It's all over now. There were a few trying moments, but we seem to have lived through them. I'll attend to all the minor details later."

"My dress!" gasped the helmet. "If they ever find that!"

"They will not. Inside of ten minutes, Mary, I shall have passed a slight token of esteem to one of Thorndyke's maids, and she'll pry the old man loose somehow and get me that gown, all wrapped up. What becomes of it then? Where does it live in ordinary times?"

"Home in the attic, but—" Mary said, and there was a new, sharp note in her voice which did not concern the party gown.

"I'll give a bond to have it there before

noon to-morrow!" young Mr. Henning said cheerily. "I know your old Maggie and Maggie knows me, Mary. She will tuck it away where it belongs and forget the incident forever."

He dabbed his forehead and glanced up and down the friendly stretch of corridor. "We have a secret now, you and I, for the rest of our lives, I presume?"

"Oh, Billy mustn't ever know!" Billy's bride cried, agitatedly, "but—"

"Then he never will know," Thomas laughed. "And see that you don't let anything slip that might get to Dolly's ears, either. She's a darling, but there are times when she might be more reasonable and trusting."

"Good-by, Mary! Or would you like to have me go down to the train with you?"

"I wish you would, but—"

"I will, indeed! Now you'd better slip in there and change your clothes; time's getting mighty short!"

"Yes, that's what I've been trying to tell you. How can I get in there?"

Thomas stared quite blankly.

"Er—haven't you the key?"

"Of course not!"

"Who has it then?"

"Peter's sister—Helen Noble. You saw her over there. She's a gipsy girl."

Much of Thomas's recent, relieved smile faded out. Possibly five seconds he hesitated; then he forced back the reassuring grin and said:

"Fool trick of me not to have asked you that before we started, Mary! You wait right here!"

"Will you hurry?" Mary asked.

If Thomas answered, he was by that time too far away for Mary to hear, which was probably as well. Thomas, as a matter of fact, was on his way down-stairs—not by the elevator, but descending the marble flights three steps at a time.

He was not angry, of course; not even vexed; but it really did seem that this key proposition might have occurred to Mary before! When a man's affianced bride is indubitably growing more and more angry with every neglected second—

There was a rather cattish-looking little woman who left the elevator and hurried to

a door far down the corridor, as Mary waited. She stared, and Mary felt the metal melt away. There was a big man, who lived up the other way and paused to address a jovial comment to the knight in armor—and then moved on with a shrug and a grunt when the knight failed to make fitting response.

And the hours were wearing on and wearing on, to the best of Mary's belief, and still Tom Henning did not return with the wretched key. It was possible that they had grabbed him again, over there, just as they had grabbed the knight; Mary choked audibly and leaned against the wall as she remembered. Or perhaps he had been run over by one of the automobiles below—or perhaps Dolly Hayes had fastened upon him and refused to let him escape again. Or perhaps—the knight stiffened. The elevator gate was opening once more—and it was Thomas at last, this time!

He did not bound forward, though. Nor did either of his hands seem to be clasping a key. With a slight droop and with no speed at all, Thomas approached and paused, after a precautionary glance up and down the corridor.

"Gone!" he said simply.

"Helen?"

"With the Motor Corps, Mary. She's chief cook and bottle-washer of that organization, you know. They were called out suddenly and they all left the ball, just as they were!"

"But—where have they gone?"

"Twenty or thirty miles down the valley, as I understand it," said Thomas, indifferently enough, for his mind was all in Braydon this evening. "Where did she put that key, when you two left here?"

"Into her pocket, of course."

"That's where it is now, Mary!" Thomas sighed.

CHAPTER XVII.

KEYS.

THE colored elevator-boy was a cheery soul. From his car, which descended just then without pausing at the fifth floor, there floated a merry, whistled Airi-

can tune. He had monopoly on the good cheer in that immediate section of the Cypria Apartments, however.

Inside the armor, a frightened little squeal was born, to issue with the same muffled effect that marked the coming of all sounds from that ill-starred costume.

"It—can't be!" Mary stated.

"Nevertheless, it would almost seem to be," Thomas smiled sadly. "I got what dope I could on the subject, which wasn't much. It appears that a hurry-call was sent out and the faithful girls just dropped everything and ran and—"

"Never mind Nell, then! If she's gone, she's gone!" Mary cried, quite frantically. "How can we get in here? Are you strong enough to break down the door?"

Her mailed hands gripped his arm and shook as if to spur him into action. Thomas detached himself gently and, putting a thumb upon the buzzer-button beside Peter Noble's door, kept it there.

"Patience, Mary," said he. "Don't get excited. A really bright idea came to me, there in the elevator. We might ring, like this, and have Peter let you in. He can vacate while you dress."

"He isn't there!"

"No? Where is he then?"

"At the ball—somewhere."

"I'm afraid not," said Thomas. "I'd know that walk of Pete's in a crowd of ten thousand and Peter wasn't among those present this evening."

He shifted fingers, since the first was growing rather cold and tired, and pressed again. Far away in the apartment, the tiny note of the buzzer was just audible. That was all!

"He's not here either, apparently," said Mary's protector, with a puzzled stare at the unanswering door. "I don't understand that at all."

"Well, Tommy, whether you understand it or not, my suit's in there—" Mary began.

"I had some such impression, Mary—and it's important to get to it, yes!" young Mr. Henning answered with the merest hint of acerbity in his tone. "My grasp of the whole situation is quite clear by this time! Wait here!"

"What for?"

"Just while I go down and shake up the superintendent, Mary. I'll tell him I'm locked out of my flat and borrow his pass-keys. He must have some."

"Your flat? Do you live here, too?"

"The door immediately opposite, my child. I rented it when it seemed reasonably certain that I was to marry Dolly, you know."

He was gone again! His color was distinctly higher as he sped down-stairs at the same break-neck speed, too; one does one's level darnedest to help one's fellowman—or woman—of course, and when the woman is one so adorable as Mary, one does even a little more, perhaps. But there does come a time when one's own affairs demand some attention, too.

Rather than showing any tendency to fade, that last vision of Dolly Hayes seemed to be graven deeper into Thomas Henning's mind as the minutes passed! He knew Dolly quite well, he felt; for a certain limited period—even for another half-hour, perhaps—it might be possible to approach Dolly and effect a reconciliation.

But if this thing went on much longer, the continued absence from Dolly's side of a soft-speaking, humbly apologetic penitent, was going to signify plain callous neglect of Miss Hayes and indifference to her feelings.

Hence, arriving at the basement, it is possible that Thomas may have put undue force into the fist that hammered the superintendent's door, for that person appeared suddenly, with only one slipper and suspenders trailing, and gasped:

"What is it? What's the matter? Fire?"

"I've locked myself out—that's all," said Thomas. "I want to borrow your pass-keys."

The superintendent relaxed massively.

"I ain't got any pass-keys," he said, finishing a previously interrupted yawn. "There's only just the two keys for each of these apartments, Mr. Henning, but—will you just wait a second, please?"

He scuffed into his own domain, while Thomas stood and fumed. Far away somewhere, he made jingling sounds, as if, rum-

maging through a tool-box—and more of them and still more of them, now muttering to himself, now addressing an explanatory word or two to the lady, invisible from the doorway, who was his wife. Then, with pipe in mouth and a dozen keys in hand, he scuffed out again.

"I ain't certain, Mr. Henning," he said, languidly, as he waited for the elevator to descend. "We had a lot of odds and ends of keys around here when the building was finished, you know, and some of 'em fit some places and some fit other places.

"No, I ain't certain, but it seems to me that one o' these keys does fit in that lock of yours. Fifth, boy!"

He rested against the wall of the car and smiled reassurance at Thomas. Young Mr. Henning sought to smile back. It was quite an effort.

And here they were at the good old fifth floor again, with the knight in armor in the center of the hall. The superintendent stopped abruptly.

"Well, wot to you know!" he chuckled. "What 'll they get up next? Friend of yours, Mr. Henning?"

"What? Yes, of course!"

"Wotta you think of that?" the superintendent muttered, and pushed back his cap to scratch his head. "A whole tin suit like these old guys you see pictures of that used to—"

"That's it!" Thomas said feverishly. "Will you try those keys, please—or just leave them with me. That's better. I don't want to take your time. You let me have them and get back to work!"

"This time o' night?" smiled the superintendent. "I don't do no work this time o' night. Now—lemme see! Was it that dinky little brass one or this nickel key? Seems to me it was the brass one. Yep, it—no, it ain't, either!" he announced, after a moment of struggle. "That's funny. I thought sure it was the brass one. Well, how about this nickel affair?"

He tried it. Nicely, as if it had been made for Thomas's apartment, the thing slid in and the latch clicked. The superintendent pushed the door open and extended the key to Thomas.

"There!" he said triumphantly. "Now,

you better keep this one, too, Mr. Henning. You're the only one's got any use for it, and I don't want the responsibility of an extra key, y' know, in case of burglars or the like o' that."

He dropped the key into Thomas's rather cold palm and scuffed away.

"Er—well—thanks—say!" Thomas managed. "Just wait a minute!"

"Yeh?"

"You might leave the rest of those keys here, if you will. I think—er—my friend across there, Mr. Noble, may find one he can use. Just leave them and I'll let him experiment when he comes. He said something—"

"Oh, that's all been fixed!" the superintendent assured him.

"What?"

"Yep! Y'see, Mr. Noble lost his extra key, Mr. Henning; so I'm having two more extra's made for him—see? The locksmith said he'd have 'em here by ten in the morning, dead sure. Will you tell Mr. Noble?"

"Yes, I'll—tell him!" Thomas faltered.

The superintendent continued his journey toward the elevator. He reached the door and, waiting, looked back.

"You'd better come in here, Mary!" Thomas said softly.

"Into—your flat?" hissed the bride.

"For a minute, anyway, until he gets out of sight!" Thomas pleaded. "He's wondering now why we're still standing here, and the last thing in the world that you want to do just now is to attract attention!"

He urged the armor gently. The armor creaked into action, bringing an admiring chuckle from the superintendent.

"Don't close that door!" Mary cried, angrily.

"Mary, I'm not exactly luring you in here, you know!" said young Mr. Henning. "I'm trying to help you—"

"Yes, and if you hadn't tried to help me in the first place, I—I'd never be here now!" Mrs. Emerson cried bitterly. "Why on earth did you bring that beastly man up with you? Why didn't you get his keys and—"

Her words died out. Faintly, from far away, yet coming distinctly through the

stillness of the Braydon night, the long-drawn note of a locomotive-whistle penetrated the fifth floor of the Cypria Apartments. Its piercing note echoed and died away.

There followed several seconds of a peculiarly heavy silence. Once more the armor took to swaying and sagging.

"Tom!" choked Mary Emerson.

"Yes, I heard it!"

"That was Billy's train!"

"It may have been—"

"It was Billy's train! It always whistles like that when it leaves the yard limits, going out! That was the train I promised Billy I'd meet! That was the train I—I swore—"

"Psst!" said Thomas, because her voice was rising.

"I will not 'psst'!" stormed the helmet. "You made me miss that train! If you'd never made me get into that ridiculous thing, I'd be on that train at this minute! I—I—" Tears choked her voice.

"Mary, will you come in here like a sane girl or do you want to stand in the doorway and have hysterics and gather a crowd and get—I don't know how much—unpleasant publicity?" young Mr. Henning asked firmly. "It's one thing or the other.

"I can't hold off all comers forever, you know. Somebody's bound to take off that helmet, if you carry on like this and—oh, come on, Mary! Don't be absurd."

He placed an arm about the knight and closed the door quietly. It chanced that the knight was weeping and in need of comfort just then; she did not resent the move.

Nor, indeed, did she resist as Thomas, with a deep, internal groan, led her to the little living-room and switched on the lights—nor even when, a moment later, he lifted off the helmet.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM DOOR TO DOOR.

HE was upon the point of delivering a short, stern lecture upon hysteria in emergencies. He did nothing of the kind. One glance at Mary just then must have melted a heart of granite.

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Her hair was mainly down—and charmingly. Her eyes, dazed and scared, glistened tears. She was tired and stricken and very lovely indeed—so that as a substitute for his lecture Thomas favored her with as radiant and cheering and soothing a smile as ever came to human features!

The eyes, however, did not grow less frightened. They were wandering about the lovely little place now, and their amazement grew and grew. Despite everything else, a thrill of pardonable pride came to Thomas.

She was astonished at the luxury of the establishment and well she might be astonished! There were few houses and no other apartments in Braydon done up quite so perfectly! What with the really good taste of Thomas himself and of Miss Dolly Hayes and the hints that a perfectly genuine New York interior decorator had been able to offer, this was a real home!

Why, the few pieces of furniture in this room alone had soared gaily into four figures; between this very spot and the kitchen one might walk over nearly two thousand dollars worth of rugs; and the bosky, thickly hung little music-room right there, with the exquisite little grand piano for Dolly—

"Tom!" Mary said, with some difficulty. "This—this isn't yours?"

"Ah! But it is!"

"But, you—forgive me—you were so poor!"

"That was before uncle died in Alaska!" said Thomas. "Is it possible that you hadn't heard about uncle dying in Alaska? I thought everybody from New Orleans to Halifax had heard about that. Yes—"

It was curious, of course, but Mary was paying no heed at all. Instead, after another sweep of the place, her eyes were upon young Mr. Henning again.

"You know what—Billy 'd think, if he were to walk in and—and find me here?" she choked.

"I do not."

"Well, he'd think that I'd heard of your getting—getting rich, or whatever did happen and that—oh, I don't know what he'd think! I don't know what he'd think!" Mary cried suddenly—and dropped into a chair, weeping again—and sought to bury

her head in the crook of her arm and found it impossible, and finally sat trembling, lips parted.

It was as pathetic a picture as Thomas had ever seen. A certain amount of anger surged up in him, too, and for a moment he was tempted to speak his opinion of William, who could think such things and scare such a girl. Instead of which:

"Nonsense, Mary!" he said. "He'll never think because he'll never know, You just sit down while I find a collar and tie and conventionalize myself generally and then we'll find the way out."

Mary merely shuddered. Thomas retired, whistling cheerily, and made his way to the bedroom; to reappear with neck adorned and his rather elderly smoking-jacket buttoned about him.

"Get off some of that tinware, Mary, and make yourself com—" he began briskly.

"I will not!" Mary flared.

"Er—I beg your pardon. I had forgotten," said Thomas. "All right; let's confine ourselves to finding the means of escape then. Um—just what did Bill do when he found you missing, down at the station?"

"He went on! He—he just cast me out of his life!" Mary said.

"Bill's not such a fool!" Thomas grinned. "At a guess, he got off, looked for you—didn't find you, and looked some more—and when the train began to start Bill concluded that you were in some other car and jumped aboard himself, and he's there now, still looking through the train for you. It sounds likely?"

"Yes."

"In fact, that's what anybody would do and it's safe to assume that Bill did just that. Next item. What are you to do?"

"Tommy! Get a crowbar and break into Peter's flat; or go down the fire-escape and break a window and—"

"The fire-escapes are all in front and lighted—and breaking Peter's door is too risky," Thomas sighed. "No, unless Pete turns up unexpectedly—and he may—we can almost count that suit of yours out of the proposition."

"But we can't!" Mary cried wildly.

"That's the only traveling-suit short of my trunk! I—I—I have to have that suit! I *have* to have it!"

"It isn't the only suit in the world, Mary," young Mr. Henning smiled, calmly enough. "How about old clothes, up at your old home?"

"There's hardly a rag! And if there were a dozen suits, you couldn't get to them without Uncle Arthur knowing, and Uncle Arthur's more suspicious even than Billy!"

"Oh? Billy is definitely suspicious, is he?"

"Yes! And about *you* he said—never mind, Tom! Go on!"

"Exactly!" said Thomas, and for some reason was forced to clear his throat. "Mary, there must be some presentable clothes somewhere at hand that will fit you. Where?"

The bride sat up suddenly, with a considerable rattle.

"In my bag!" she cried! "There's a new serge dress in that!"

"And the bag's in Peter's flat?"

"No! It's down at the station. Peter took it down and checked it!" Mary cried, brightening by the second.

"Give me the check, Mary!" Thomas said briefly.

"I can't!" said the bride. "It's in there on Sally's pincushion, I believe. That's where Peter said he'd leave it and I—I forgot to take it!"

She dropped again and her fleeting brightness departed. Young Mr. Henning, however, took to radiating again.

"Don't let that worry you!" he said. "Old Harkness himself takes the night trick in his checking-room nowadays, and I can get his very teeth away from him. Leave the bag to me! That's settled, Mary! After that—what? Can I hire you an airplane, to catch that infernal train? Can I—why, see here! Bill's on his way to New York. He has to put in two hours down at the junction waiting for the through train!"

"Yes, he spoke of that and—"

"You'll be there before that train leaves, Mary!" stated Thomas, and heaved a great sigh. "Murphy has two cars down in the garage that will do better than seventy and

he's got an ex-racing driver working on one of his taxis. He'll put you over that fifty miles in better than eighty minutes!"

"Really!"

"Yes, and have five minutes to spare out of that eighty! *That's* settled, too! Now, what else is there? Ah! To be sure! Just what are you going to say when you do meet Bill?"

"I—don't know!" Mary faltered.

"Well, of course, being forced into lying is always horrible, Mary," young Mr. Henning said, without great emotion, "but it seems to me that, placed in a similar position, I should give William a baby stare, ask just *where* he was while you hunted for him through the train—and jumped off at the last minute, of course—and then get mad and inquire whether he cares so little for his wife that he will force her to tear through the night at sixty miles an hour with a strange driver! Do you get the drift of it?"

"Oh, yes," Mary sighed.

"There is nothing more to be said. I'll get a taxi down-stairs and I'll be back inside of ten minutes, bag, car, driver, and everything else. Good-by, my child, and don't look so forlorn. The worst is all over!"

Unsuccessfully, the bewildered eyes tried to smile at him. Thomas turned away rather hurriedly and made for the door; years beyond memory, when on rare occasions he had seen tears on Mary's cheeks, there had been an almost irresistible impulse to kiss them away, and it was no weaker now.

Furthermore, if his rather wild scheme were to be worked out, every second counted! From the closet at one corner of the foyer, Thomas extracted his light overcoat and a perfectly conventional felt hat, and turned to give Mary a final encouraging smile. Then, with his hand upon the knob, he started slightly and paused, visited by some new instinct of caution.

Just across the hall, as nearly as he could judge, somebody was rapping smartly upon a door with his knuckles; and while there was no earthly reason why he should not knock as long and as hard as he chose, this was really no time for Thomas to hurl

open his own door and reveal an armored knight with brilliant, tousled hair and glorious eyes to a possibly interested fellow tenant.

The knocking continued. Thomas frowned and stooped finally, placing one eye neatly over his keyhole and squinting hard.

And as he squinted, a pronounced prickling took place about the roots of his hair; a visible shock ran through his body; his mouth opened and remained open. Had one been near enough to watch, it would have been apparent that much of Thomas's excited coloring had selected this moment to go somewhere else!

He rose, then, quite suddenly. He stared at Mary, who sat with head bowed. A strained, almost an awful, smile came palely to his lips.

It is entirely possible that this was no manifestation of fright, because Thomas was no coward; on the other hand, an intelligent five-year-old boy could have told accurately that young Mr. Henning was not about to burst into a song of rejoicing.

He shook himself together, however, and tiptoed quickly to the knight.

"Mary!" he hissed.

"Yes? What? What is it?" Mary cried.

"Hush! Not so loud! Mary, Bill didn't go on his train, after all!"

The pallor of his smile penetrated Mary's preoccupation. With several faint creaks, she rose suddenly, eyes dilating.

"What do you mean?" she breathed.

"Where is he? How do you know—"

From the door of Thomas's own apartment, the door not twenty feet distant, sounded the same sharp, blood-curdling knock. It may be admitted that Thomas swallowed hard.

"Well, I think that's Bill now!" said he.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CALLER.

CULTIVATED intelligence, it is alleged, constitutes the one sure preventive of blind, unreasoning excitement and all its entailing disasters. Seek-

ing the reason for volcanic unpleasantness of various forms, from theater panics to Bolshevism, we are bidden to delve down deep and find as an original cause the ignorant, untutored mind.

Conversely, then—since both Mary Emerson and William Henning were decidedly intelligent and possessed a certain degree of culture—it might have seemed that in this rather awkward moment their two brains would have functioned calmly, readily, efficiently, making swift analysis of their problem and landing accurately upon the very head of the correct answer.

Instead, Mary merely stared up and Thomas merely stared down; and for several seconds at least their countenances blazed with that high, compelling intelligence one finds upon the features of a half-grown oyster. Could there have been anything more blank and uninspired than Mary's expression just then, it was the expression of Thomas Henning.

Yet shock works wonders sometimes. The first knock upon his door had dazed young Mr. Henning. This second one, coming with greater force, appeared to restore his faculties—and Mary, too, was coming around slowly, for she whispered, thickly and almost inaudibly:

"Not—really Billy?"

"Yes! I saw him through the keyhole!" Thomas hissed.

"Tommy, if he ever finds me here—"

"He will not. I'm not going to answer that door!"

"But if Billy's really looking for me, he'll know you're here and he'll force his way in, because he'll know you're here! He'll ask that fat janitor and the elevator-boy and everybody, and they'll all say you're here! And when you don't open the door, he'll *know* that—"

"Hush, Mary!" breathed Thomas. "There may be something in that, too. I'll have to see him for a minute, I suppose. I—well, get in there!"

"In where?"

"Through the music-room and into my little den, I guess!" young Mr. Henning said hastily, as he dragged a scarf and comb from the helmet and, rolling them up, thrust them unceremoniously out of sight

under Mary's heavy breast-plate. "There's a closet in there and you'll have to get inside!"

"But if he should hunt—"

"Stand still! You're nothing but a suit of armor, of course!" said Thomas in his thrilling whisper. "We can get away with that! The den isn't ready for use yet—the desk's all wrapped in burlap and the chairs, and even the rug isn't down. Ready, Mary?"

"For that horrible helmet again?" Mary faltered.

The knock came even again!

"Shall we just let him in and take a long chance and have a show-down?" Thomas added, unsteadily.

"Put it on, Tom! Please put it on!" said Mary Emerson, offering her lovely head for its iron covering.

In the most absurd way, the room danced about Thomas. He shut his teeth and managed to replace the helmet without a betraying clank of metal; his hand went under Mary's mailed arm again and cautiously, hardly breathing, he led her across the thick rug and to the thicker one of the music-room, and through that and across the little corridor to the room that some day—but for to-night—would have been the little den in which he and Dolly passed an occasional evening!

But she was in there at last, even though the gentleman on the far side of the door seemed intent upon smashing a panel with his fist just now. Young Mr. Henning summoned his faithful smile and forced the choppy, gasping effect from his breathing.

Then, hat and coat hurled soundlessly into the closet, Thomas opened the door of his home. Mingled with a touch of boredom, there was upon his face just the amount of polite inquiry one should wear when opening the door of one's home.

But the crash would come now, in about two seconds! Bill would leap at him and clutch his throat and—or no, Bill seemed to have no such immediate intention. Inscrutable, apparently imperturbable, William Emerson was regarding him with peculiar fixedness.

Thomas opened his eyes in artless amazement! His head was thrust forward sud-

denly and effectively, too, as if he were not quite able to believe the report of the eyes!

"Why—Bill!" he cried.

"Hello, Tom," William said briefly, and his voice was strangely quiet.

"Why—say, upon my word, this is a surprise!" the tenant of the apartment added joyfully, recovering from the first amazement as it seemed. "What in the world—say, I thought you were in Europe by this time?"

"Not just yet," William said, in the same low voice, as befitted an old friend, and of course, stepped in uninvited.

"You're really back in Braydon?"

"You see me," William muttered, with the faintest of smiles. "Only for a little while, though."

This time Thomas actually managed to laugh his keen pleasure! What is more, he slapped William affectionately upon the back when he had closed the door.

"Why, old man, you've no idea what a shock—a joyful shock—it is, to see you turn up like this!"

William no more than nodded. He was standing in the center of the living-room now, looking about. He was in and, apparently, he meant to stay for a while.

If, for an instant or so as he opened the door, Thomas Henning had cherished a hope that inspiration would come and point the way to keeping William safely in the corridor, the hope had surely died—unborn.

No, William decidedly was in and—what next? A tiny sigh fluttered upon young Mr. Henning's lips for a moment—and then they smiled again. Presently he would learn what he was to learn; in the slightly distressing interim, it was his to act as well as might be the part of one friend entertaining another.

"Well, sit down, Bill!" he cried. "Sit down and tell us all about it! Have a cigarette?"

"Not now, thanks," said William, and failed to sit down. "Did I—er—disturb you?"

"Disturb me? No. I was out back. Was that you knocking all the time?"

"I knocked several times."

"I thought it was somebody up-stairs hammering something," grinned Thomas as

he lighted a cigarette of his own. "You can trust that chair behind you, you know."

William's hands went into his pockets. Fancy it may have been, but it seemed that he made another attempt to search Thomas Henning's soul.

"I'll just look around," he said. "You don't mind?"

"Mind?" laughed the owner of the place. "I should say not, Bill! I'm proud of everything in this little dump. Look it over!"

"You inherited some money, didn't you?"

"A dollar or two. The place looks it. Yes, I understand. Don't rub it in, Bill. You may be poor yourself some day."

"I had no idea of rubbing it in," William said shortly. "They said that it was nearly a million?"

"They did? They were modest. Some of them have said that it was nearer a billion," Thomas replied.

Young Mr. Emerson hummed a bar or two and gazed on. Despite the admirable self-control with which he seemed blessed just now, Thomas found himself frowning. What was it, anyway—a cross-examination? What did Bill mean by this odd, close-mouthed inspection of things in general? If he harbored unjust suspicion, why did he not come out with it like a man, even like an infuriated husband?

"Nice place, Tom!" he observed.

"Thanks. Best I could do," smiled its owner.

"You married Dolly Hayes, eh?"

"Not yet. I have some hopes."

"Not yet, eh?" William's almost monotonous voice went on. "I imagined that you were all settled down. All alone here, then? And just enjoying it in advance, as it were?"

"You have grasped, virtually, the whole proposition, Bill," Thomas said, somewhat coolly. "I'm not actually even living here as yet; I've been sleeping here for the last three nights, because it was nearer the office, and I hope to sleep here for several more nights, for the same reason."

"I didn't mean to seem to pry, Tom," William said with a little shrug; and proved

his sincerity with: "How many rooms have you got here, anyhow?"

"Six and two baths."

"You don't say!" muttered the visitor, and sauntered into the music-room in the most casual fashion. "Cozy little corner, this one, isn't it?"

"We thought it was the coziest in town," said Thomas, following with a step as indifferent as might be. "Nothing's in shape here yet, of course, Bill. You really can't tell what things will look like later. Here's the little hall that runs down the middle. Here's what will be my den."

He stepped in! He switched on the lights! He even beamed, inviting William's approval; and Mr. Emerson shot a keen eye from the burlap-shrouded desk to the burlap-shrouded chairs—from the wrapping-paper still upon the huge new couch over to the little pile of excelsior in the corner.

There was a powerful smell of newness and long-confined fresh varnish in that room which suggested that it had not been opened in days; and perhaps this thought appealed to William, for he turned, sent his gaze down the dark corridor and waited for Thomas to close the door again!

"Dining-room right over here," William explained, almost blithely, and turned on more lights. "Peach, Bill?"

"I should say it was!" said William as he glanced behind the sideboard.

"And, coming over here again, we find the main bedroom—twenty-two by twenty!"

Once more he punched a button. Once more William Emerson entered a room just a thought too suddenly. William's brows were queerly contracted, too. He looked about and walked directly to the closet, which he threw open with:

"Lots of closet room, too, Tom!"

"As a matter of fact, that's the only real one in the place, Bill," Thomas said deprecatingly, and shaded a yawn. "That's the only kick Dolly made when we decided on this apartment. Still, you can't have everything, I suppose. Come and see the kitchen!"

He led the way, himself humming just now. Proudly, he waved a hand, indicating

something less than an acre of white tiling, disposed upon walls and floors.

"Maid goes with this, if we can catch her, of course," he explained. "Here's the little cubby-hole where she's supposed to sleep when off duty. Neat?"

Further electricity blazed in the tiny room behind. William sauntered straight in and looked around—gazed down the hall again—and smiled suddenly. It was an unfathomable smile, too. One might almost have thought that an overwhelming oppression had been lifted from William's soul!

"Yes, it's a dandy little place all the way through, Tom!" he said heartily. "Looking this over, I'm less inclined to build a whole house when we do get back."

"Oh? You're not back for good, then?" Thomas asked politely. "Come back where I keep the real chairs and tell me about it, Bill!"

He led the way. He opened the cigarette-box again and pointed to the big chair beside the little smoking-stand, and this time William Emerson dropped lazily, naturally, into the upholstery.

"No, I'm just making a lightning visit, Tom," he explained. "I can't stay here more than five minutes. It—er—just struck me, as I passed, that some one who wrote me recently from the office said Pete Noble lived up here and I thought I'd look in on him for a second or two."

"He's off somewhere or other to-night, I believe."

"He seems to be. I had no idea that you lived here until I saw your name on the little plate outside," William pursued. "Pete, of course, is all married and settled down now?"

"Yes, Pete married Sally Bond and they're as happy as they make 'em. How's Mary, by the way?"

"Oh, Mary's fine!" William said smoothly. "She's in town."

"Mary? Here? In town?" echoed Thomas Henning, astonishment all but overcoming him.

"Came on ahead to see her folks," explained Mary's husband, and flicked the ash from his cigarette. "I thought you might have run across her?"

"Me? I never run across anybody any more, Bill," sighed Thomas. "We put in twelve hours a day at the office, these times."

"No, I meant to-night—possibly at the ball across the street."

"Oh! Was Mary going to that ball?" asked Thomas, and the stare that went with the question should have earned him a medal.

"Not that I'm aware," William said. "But Mary and parties always had a sort of affinity and I thought—what is the affair, anyhow, Tom?"

"Just a masquerade."

"You're not attending?"

"I'm past that sort of thing, Bill," yawned Thomas. "By the time I've finished up the day's work, I'm ready to sit down somewhere. Bad sign, you know—getting old. But I'm fed up on the gaiety stuff. I—oh, see here! Surely you're not going?"

William was out of his chair again. Thomas faced him almost pleadingly. For a moment, William looked at his old friend—so very queerly! Then his hand went out suddenly.

"I want to beg your pardon, Tom," said he.

"What?"

"I do, indeed!" said William, and wrung the hand of his friend.

"What are you begging my pardon for?" Thomas inquired blankly.

"Well, *that's* something you don't know and you never will know," said young Mr. Emerson with a small slightly troubled smile. "But I want to do it, all the same. Will you tell Pete that I stopped in?"

"Of course, but won't you—"

"I can't stop another minute, Tom!" said William, and made for the door. "Really! Good-by!"

Once more he shook his friend's hand. Then the door closed upon him and Thomas, swaying much as Mary had swayed several times this evening, dropped against the wall and listened. He might have spared himself the trouble. Mr. Emerson's heels clicked smartly down the corridor and stopped before the elevator; and presently there was a clanging of the door—

and Thomas opened his own portal perhaps one inch and peered out.

The corridor was empty. William had passed on!

CHAPTER XX.

"OPEN THAT DOOR!"

NOT instantly did Thomas turn and rush back to his little friend, all closeted in her armor. Instead, he stood through five good minutes, breathing heavily and merely waiting. A stone-visaged youth who can walk into another man's flat in search of his wife, who can stroll straight through, looking for her, and still keep up a flow of casual conversation, is capable of even more!

It was not only thinkable, it was downright likely that the nastily suspicious William, having thoroughly lulled Thomas Henning into a sense of false security, would turn around, come back and burst in!

Yet he did not. When the five minutes had passed, the need for action surged back upon Thomas. He sped to the den and the closet. The armor stood there, motionless, soundless, and he smiled wanly.

"It's all right, Mary!" he said. "We're alone again!"

The armor turned weakly and tottered slowly out. Tenderly, almost, because every angle seemed to express the agony of the young woman within, Thomas lifted off the unwieldy headgear. The tears seemed to have been streaming again!

"Did you hear him?"

"Almost—every word!" Mary whispered. "I thought that I—I should die!"

"Nonsense! There wasn't anything to die about, Mary!" Thomas forced himself to say brightly. "Bill's been all through the place now and he's convinced that you're not here."

"He—came in here!" pursued the dream whisper. "B-B-Billy was right in here, looking for me!" A great, glistening tear slipped from either eye as she gazed at Thomas. "*Looking for me—here!*"

"He wasn't doing that, Mary. He was just looking through the flat, of course. And he wasn't even angry—that's a big point.

You see, missing that train can't have been nearly so important as you fancied; he just left it and came to look for you, and he wasn't even annoyed about losing it!"

The tousled head shook slowly.

"You don't know Billy, Tom. He has different ways of being angry. When he's noisy, it's terrible. But when he's so mad that he never shows a sign of it—"

"Yes?"

"I don't want to talk about it!" Mary shuddered. "What—what shall I do now?"

"Do you want to meet him accidentally, somewhere here in town, once you have some clothes, tell him the best one we can think up and have the whole show over on the spot?"

"No! Because—"

"I understand. I suppose it is rather risky," Thomas said quickly. "All right, then. We'll stick to the original scheme, then. You've got plenty of cash?"

"Plenty. In my bag, with my ticket and—everything."

"Good enough! I'll get the bag and the car and we'll start you off just as if Billy hadn't stopped over," Thomas said quietly. "That's best, anyway. Get your train and keep right on to New York."

"Wire back to your dear Uncle Arthur and have him tell Bill what hotel to find you at. That's all, isn't it?"

"It is, if you get my bag!" moaned Mary, who was very badly shaken indeed.

"You come back to the living-room, Mary," Thomas said firmly, and steered the uncertain iron form from its hiding-place.

"In here! Now, you settle right down in that chair and just be a good, patient little girl for that ten minutes, will you?"

"If the phone rings or the bell rings, don't answer. You'll be all right?"

Mary nodded numbly. Thomas whisked out overcoat and hat again—glanced into the corridor and found it empty—turned back for a final smile at Mary Emerson, the bride of William, who had begged his pardon. Her lovely head rested upon the cushions of the chair; her lovely chin rested upon an unyielding breast-plate. Thomas, then, departed, whistling.

He returned, but not whistling, with the

ten minutes hardly gone. Eyes clouded despite his best efforts and the smile altogether vanished, Thomas slipped into his apartment in a furtive, criminal fashion and, once inside, stood stock still and stared at Mary for a moment.

She had not altered a single detail of her position, but she altered it now and quite abruptly. With a harsh, clattering rattle, Mary struggled to her feet and stood swaying as she cried:

"My bag! You didn't get my bag!"

"I couldn't, Mary!" Thomas said thinly.

"I knew it! I knew it!" Mary choked.

"That wretched check—"

"It wasn't the wretched check, my child. The bag isn't down there. It wasn't there when I landed—and I made some trip, believe me!" puffed young Mr. Henning.

"And it's lost now, and it has all the clothes I wanted!"

Thomas locked the door and advanced hurriedly.

"Don't talk so loud, Mary. It isn't lost, you know. Bill has it!"

"Billy!"

"Yes. I went straight in to old Harkness and learned the worst in one minute, Mary. It appears that Bill hunted all over the station for you while the train was standing there and he spotted your bag on the shelf the minute his eye lighted on it.

"Then the train went out and—whatever his plans may be—Bill merely went in and insisted on having the bag, and Harkness, knowing him of course, finally gave it to him. That's the whole story. It's—er—too bad!"

His smile came slowly and forlornly. In coldest truth, Thomas was more disturbed just then than he had been at any previous moment of the evening; be one's disposition optimistic as it may, it is rather unnerving to have definitely on hand a bride whose only outer raiment is an iron suit and whose husband is likely to appear at any moment.

Yet nothing of this, as it seemed, appealed to Mary; indeed, Thomas's smile merely infuriated her!

"Too bad!" she cried hotly. "You—you ruin my whole life and then grin and tell me it's—too bad!"

"I'm not grinning. I—"

"Yes, you are! You're laughing! It seems funny to you! Do you know what Billy'd do to you if he ever really found me here?"

"Shall we just drop that sort of speculation and spend our time looking for the best way out of it?" Thomas asked quietly.

"No! Because I—I like to think of what he'd do to you!" Mary cried, quite irresponsibly. "He'd drop business and everything else and consecrate the rest of his days to making your life a hell on earth! He'd hound you till you pleaded for death!" Mary assured him who sought to aid her. "He would! He said he would! and he always does as he says."

"Well, that would—er—be taking altogether too much trouble on my account, Mary," Thomas said. "I don't believe it, anyway. And I think you're foolish to waste time in hysterics that we might use in devising ways and means. You know, those clothes of yours aren't necessarily the only ladies' garments in Braydon!"

"What?"

"No, there are lots more girls in town and they have quantities of clothes. The only question is how to get hold of an armful for you and do it quick!"

Little Mrs. Emerson controlled herself. Her voice grew plaintive, even humble, as she asked:

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

"Yes, Tom? How?"

"Give me two minutes for deep thought and I'll tell you," Thomas smiled. "Don't fly at me like that, Mary, again; it takes time and it's unnecessary. The worst of it's over now; everything unpleasant that can happen has happened and all that remains is for us to keep cool and discover how to shoot you over to that train in time."

Mary nodded contritely.

"The way's all clear ahead of us now," Thomas concluded. "There'll be no more jars and slips and mischances to—"

Lips apart, he paused. If human ears can be pricked up, Thomas's did just that thing. There had been a hint of sound, out there in the corridor, two seconds ago; there had been a bump and what resembled an astonished African voice saying: "Heah! what call yoh got to push me lak that? Ah cain't help it if you're in a hurry!"

There had been, then, a hint of these things. But the heels that hammered down the corridor were solid, demonstrable fact and no hint at all. And the fist that pounded upon the Henning door just now was so real as to bring a stifled, inaudible shriek from the unhelmeted knight.

"Open it, Henning!" said the new, low, terrible voice of William Emerson without! "Don't wait to hide her this time! Open that door this instant, or by the Lord! I'll come through it anyway!"

Y O U T H

BY DAVID FERRIS KIRBY

YOU,
Who are young,
Do not lose sight of the dream
Of your youth.
Keep your head up,
Look onward,
Breathe deeply,
Reach for the goal.
Forget the past;
You have much to live for.
The future is yours.
Go.

Teach: Pirate De Luxe

by C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne



THE first of C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne's series of stories detailing the adventures of "Teach: Pirate De Luxe," was printed in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, issue of May 22. One will appear in each of our issues throughout the summer months. While each story is complete in itself, all are concerned with the adventures of that likable blackguard, Captain Teach—descendant of the notorious pirate Blackbeard—and charming Mary Arncliffe.

XI—THE DOCTOR

SOME day or other these jottings from the history of Captain Edward Teach will need a good deal of editing and pulling together.

I do not think I have set down anything that is in the least inaccurate. On the contrary, I have left out much that was told me, but which I have not been able to check. But, as regards chronological order, there I admit that in more than one place I am very probably hopelessly at sea.

For instance, there is the doctor episode. I have not the remotest notion where it ought to come in. Obviously it must have taken place some time when Teach himself was off the coast of the Carolinas, his great grandfather, Blackbeard's, old cruising ground.

But when ships were "held up" by the Teach emissaries in those seas, Teach was always himself elsewhere. So, as I have not been able to run across to Conistone myself to verify dates, I give the account

of Dr. Peter Cray's abduction here, and must wait till a later time to fit it into its proper place.

Teach, of course, cared remarkably little in reality for the welfare of his men. If they were killed there was so much the more for the survivors to divide up. If they were wounded, that was largely their own affair.

His annoyance at their becoming inefficient, temporary or otherwise, was more than counterbalanced by the stream of recruits that was always pressing itself upon him. It says little for the bed-rock honesty of the seafaring peoples in 1919, or much for their taste for old-fashioned piracy (whichever you like) when one contemplates that eager string of recruits. Teach's views on the matter were, in fact, very much the same as those his redoubtable ancestor carried in the early seven-teen hundreds.

The modern pirate crew, however, showed

themselves to be of a very different metal to Blackbeard's ruffians of two centuries earlier. This new lot had no use whatever for amputations performed by the carpenter, and shuddered at the idea of boiling pitch as a styptic.

They had all heard (it appeared) of antiseptic surgery, and anesthetics, and conceived a mad admiration for them; and when five men after the action off the Azores (I think it must have been then) died unpleasantly, Teach discovered a movement in the forecabin that smelt remarkably like mutiny.

Now he was a dark-faced man, and he had a hard, black mind, but he was no pig-headed fool with a taste for butting against an immoveable bulkhead. A doctor was it, they wanted? Couldn't some handy man aboard take on the job? The cabin steward, now, Llewelyn Jones? He'd been a dentist.

Captain Teach, if it came to his turn—and he exposed himself far more than any other member of the ship's company—was quite open to entrust himself to the delicate operating of Llewelyn.

But the crew had voted emphatically against the squint-eyed steward. Three of them, it seemed, had entrusted their teeth to his machinery, with lamentable results to both teeth and purse.

"Very well," said Teach. "If you are set on a pukka doctor with, as you stipulate, letters after his name, I will catch one for you. I can't do it at once, because we are in mid-ocean, and doctors (at least the best of them) are not amphibious animals. But I guarantee to pinch one for you within ten days, together with the tools of his craft, and what drugs he may have in stock.

"Got all that? Now let's hear no more of this squeamishness. A young ladies' school atmosphere seems to me distinctly out of place on the *Littondale* while she's running on her present charter. Damn your collective eyes, don't you realize yet that you're pirates, with a hanging in front of you if you show just one soft spot to any living being on the face of the globe outside your own club? But you shall have your doctor, because I have said you should."

Just north of abominable Hatteras on the eastern seaboard of the United States, as you will remember, is that fine patch of difficult water called Albemarle Sound. Up the various small creeks running into it are situated the wooden buildings of sundry hunting clubs, and into the head-waters pours the muddy stream of the Roanoke River. The houseboats of the professional shooters of the canvas-back duck lie off the beaches.

There is a bit of a harbor in at the back of the island that carries Cape Hatteras, and shelters the mouth of the Sound, and in this harbor Teach installed a 38-knot M. L. which was camouflaged as an old-fashioned steam yacht with a large fat yellow funnel.

It looked as if she could do a meager six knots at a pinch. Thanks to oak-varnished three-ply, she was the exact image of one of those comfortable family boats that the elderly city man, with a taste for cruising, keeps in summer commission for the benefit of an expanding family.

The chubby yacht called herself *Petronella*, and dispensed forbidden firewater lavishly to all who called. Visitors were not asked on board, because the three-ply additions were only for external view.

The steward, a Welshman, who called himself Owen Trevor, and wore a noticeable outward squint, said he had the strictest instructions from the owner, Mr. Furstenburg, first, to show nobody over the ship, and, second, to send nobody away without a drink. As his measure of "a drink" was a bottle of unexceptionable Scotch whisky from an apparently inexhaustible cellar, this effort at popularity produced instant success in a land that had wakened up one dismal morning and found, to its annoyance, that it had "gone dry."

A less ostentatious hospitality would, to my mind, have been safer. But there you have a sample of Teach's vanity. Even on this ticklish kidnaping expedition, while the *Littondale* was drawing off the scent elsewhere—it was somewhere in the Florida Channel from what I can gather—he could not endure the thought that his trumpery *Petronella* should remain unnoticed.

His instinct for advertisement showed

him the right way. He might have given a million apiece to a score of charities, and nobody would have been thrilled. But by distributing to thirsty America a couple of cases of whisky, he jumped into instant popularity—as Mr. Furstenburg.

In the meanwhile he was investigating the villages which lay convenient to Albemarle Sound, and searching into the records of their resident medical men. Keeping faith is perhaps a curious trait for a pirate, and Teach frankly did not want to be bothered with a doctor. But he had promised his crew a first-class practitioner, and having promised, was at pains to see he did not get an inferior article.

One rather chuckles to think what will be the feelings of the medical gentlemen in that district when they find that the dark philanthropist with the beak nose and the bit chipped out of his ear who put them through their paces in 1919 was the notorious Teach. The twenty thousand dollar a year position was a perfectly true yarn. He was purposely vague about locality. It would hardly have done to have said he was hunting for a surgeon for the Littondale.

There were quacks, and cranks, and fools, and blitherers that he turned down promptly enough; as he set an age limit of thirty-five for the Littondale's surgeon, many were too old; and many very able G. P.'s who had not kept up their surgery were disqualified for that special reason. In the end he fined down his possibles to four, and I shall not create jealousy in the neighborhood of Albemarle Sound by mentioning names of the three who had a four to one chance of being kidnapped.

Dr. Peter Cray of Conistone was the successful (or, if you prefer it, unfortunate) winner of the competition, and so he alone will be pilloried in this memoir.

Cray was a Harvard man, but he had journeyed via a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford, and had got an M.D. there to tack on to his American degree. He had also qualified in San Francisco, and somewhere in the Middle West, but I have lost my note which told me exactly where.

Anyway, he possessed the necessary "string of letters after his name" that these

modern pirates with the board school sharpness demanded. He had the best local practice at Conistone, where he lived and was honorary surgeon to the hospital at the adjacent county town of Kilnsey. Altogether he was on paper quite the man for surgeon on a pirate ship, though to be just, three of his neighbors round the Sound equally attained to that dubious distinction.

Nature has constructed some men specially to be doctors, and Peter Cray was one of them. He was big, and calm, and strong, and he exuded vitality. He owned breeziness and humor.

If he sat for ten minutes by a sick woman's bedside and said, "Come, now, I thought you were ill. Why, you are pulling round splendidly," well, there was the commencement of a cure.

Incidentally he was a good pathologist and a very tolerable all-round surgeon who knew enough to cover up a mistake when he made one. It was said of Cray by his professional brethren that he might diagnose gall-stones, and operate for gall-stones, and find no gall-stones, but yet would triumphantly produce gall-stones for the patient's edification when he emerged from the anesthetic.

A very sound all-round doctor was the grizzled Peter Cray, M.D., M.R.C.S., and all the rest of it. (I never can remember all these strings of letters, especially the efflorescent American varieties.) But he was not a money maker, first because he was fool enough not to charge for two-thirds of his services, and secondly because of another reason who dyed her hair a different color three times a week, and wore more scent than the State law ought to have permitted.

Everybody said Cray was far too good for a one-eyed country practice like Conistone. But then it was common knowledge he had committed one sin of omission just after he had qualified—and the lady had married somebody else, and another sin of commission just when he put up his plate, and he had never had the pluck to divorce her. Doctors do seem to be especially liable to these lapses.

I want to write fairly about Dr. Cray,

as an impartial historian ought to write, but frankly, my mind is a bit warped in favor of the man.

His father looked a rich man, but died suddenly and left nothing. Peter kept himself going at Harvard and elsewhere by scholarships. He took high degrees, and lots of them. Everybody who knew him predicted something glittering. Yet in spite of that, behold him G. P. in a village.

Wine and women, so statistics show, are the ruin of one medical student out of three. Women handicapped Peter Cray—one, of the good variety; one, solidly decadent. Teach, though he did not know it, sailed in between the counter-influence of the two of them.

Teach made his first inquiries at Conistone corner grocery, where they sold everything from a tin tack to an anchor. His accent was of Maryland or Vermont. He was Mr. Joshua K. Furstenburg.

He had heard that Conistone was the one spot in all the United States where a hard-driven man could get a rest cure, and was feeling improvement from the word "go." But he would like to hear if there was any one who could hustle the cure along.

Three marksmen suspended operations at the cuspidor, and guessed that Doc Cray was it. Teach, as Mr. Furstenburg, got one of them to ring up Cray's house and make an appointment for an ailing friend.

Teach found Dr. Cray surprising. "I shouldn't have thought your name was Furstenburg," was Cray's first remark. "You've got English blood in you, and possibly a dash of Spanish or Portuguese. Certainly not Teutonic. Pedigree interests me, and incidentally has a large bearing on stomachs. How far can you go back with the Furstenburg history?"

Captain Teach was generally ready enough with his tongue. But here a subject, on which he was usually fluent, found him at a loss.

"About one generation," said he. "I am no use at ancient history."

"No. I guessed it would be like that," said Cray dryly. "And which is the pain you wish to bring into prominence at this particular moment?"

Teach was prepared for this, and with the subject well crammed up, gave tedious details. Cray, possibly with suspicion aroused, cross-examined mercilessly. And the pair of them ended up an hour's bout full of mutual suspicion. A scented woman with dyed hair flitted in and out of the room, and past across the window during the consultation.

"I wonder if you'd like to come and have a bit of a blow in my yacht?" said Teach at the finish. "She's back of Hatteras now, but is coming across the Sound for me here to-morrow."

"Sorry," said Cray. "Busy."

There they left it. The scented woman flitted by as he left the house. But Teach went away fully decided that Dr. Cray was the exact man to fill the post of surgeon on the Littondale.

Teach ostentatiously left Conistone that afternoon, but without any ostentation whatever reentered the village at two o'clock next morning. He had with him Mr. Llewelyn Jones as bodyguard, and gave that shifty person clearly to understand that any failure on his part to carry out orders with exactitude would be dealt with fatally.

It is always well when dealing with people of Llewelyn's type, to have plain speaking on these matters. They met Dr. Cray just emerging from his own front door. A wave of scent followed him.

"Judging from your genial manner when we parted," said the pirate, "I don't think you'll be surprised when I assure you that I'm going to shoot you dead if you don't do exactly what I order you."

"No," said Cray, "that's all right. I spotted that bullet clip in your left ear, and the general outline and coloring of the published portraits of Captain Teach. Those, on the top of your rottenly faked symptoms of angina, would have made a babe suspicious."

"But as an extremely poor man I don't see I'm a cashable asset to an expert of your profession. It may surprise you to learn that I have not even an insurance put by."

"I'll explain later how you can be of use, doctor, when in fact you start earning

the twenty thousand dollars a year which your billet will carry. For the present I want you to come along with us to the boat, and—this is very important—to keep your head shut very exactly as we walk through the village."

"You can guess I don't snap at the offer, though I admit it has its attractions. I presume you're offering me the position of surgeon on your pirate ship. A big operating practice is always a lure to a man who is keen on his profession."

"Also, I recognize that you'll put a .450 expanding bullet into my liver without a qualm if you don't get your way. But at the same time I'm going to accept that bullet and rob you of a highly efficient ship's surgeon if I don't get my way first."

"I hardly follow you," said the pirate.

"Well, I'm going to propose a compromise. I'm going out now—or, rather, I was going out when you turned up—to see a patient. I operated on her this morning."

"What for?"

"Never mind what for. You're a layman. Something internal; that's good enough for you. And she took it mighty badly. Maybe I bungled. Surgeons do, sometimes, especially when they're a bit overanxious."

"Mark you, I don't think I did bungle, but I can guarantee to you the patient is in an exceedingly dangerous state. I've got to go to her now. Understand what I say? Got to go. If I don't, she dies anyway."

"Man, don't think this is merely a dodge to slip away from your damned schemes. I may save her life if I go now. If God's not forgotten Conistone, I believe I shall save it. So I must go to her first. Now you understand."

"I'm sorry," said Teach, "but I can't afford to wait. And my own men come first. The lady must take her chance. You must stroll along with me to the landing, doctor."

"I thought that would be your tune. Shoot, damn you, and get it over."

Captain Edward Teach, like his great grandfather, Blackbeard, always prided himself on having no qualms whatever

about killing an unarmed man when it was necessary for his own personal convenience to do so. "Asking for a fight" is, of course, mere foolishness in active piratical circles. But he was frankly unwilling to waste such an asset as Dr. Peter Cray.

The man struck him as just the surgeon to keep a pirate crew in good trim, and though he was untidily clothed, with a little good-humored persuasion he could be smartened up, and, in spruce evening kit, be a distinct addition to the Littondale's dining table. (To tell the truth, Teach was getting very tired of the be-diamonded Mr. Evans with his genteel conversation, and sodden old McDow who always had to bite off his stories half-way through when Mary Arncliffe dined with them.)

Also, although he regretted strenuously such unbusinesslike weakness, he liked the man.

Altogether, he hated the idea of wasting him—or, in other words, of shooting him there and then, and going on to the next of his four selections.

"Shoot, damn you, if you are going to, and be quick about it. Quite understand that if you try and grab me, I shall sing out and rouse the village. I am not going to be hauled off to the lugger and leave my girl untended."

Teach rubbed his big black chin.

"Don't get rattled," he advised. "You aren't dead yet, though you are mighty near it. How long do you want with this woman, and what guarantee can you give me that the whole thing isn't merely a trick to help you to get away?"

"Half an hour will be all I want. As for getting away, I suppose my parole is no good, or I would give you that, readily enough. But the cottage is a small enough one, and has only one door back and front. Surely you and the blackguard with the squint can watch those?"

"Doctor," said Teach gruffly, "you offered me your parole that you would not make a bolt of it. I accept that. Now, let's move along, please, and not keep your patient waiting."

In silence after that, the three of them left the house with its cloying woman's scent, between the gardens which separate

Conistone's wooden cottages from the street, and came at last to a spot where the doctor halted.

"She's in there," he said simply, and unlatched the gate, and passed down the garden path between box-hedges and flowerbeds. He paused a moment with his hand on the gate.

"You see those flowers? Laura planted them. She loves flowers. So do I. Also flower scents. I loathe, abhor, and detest other scents.

"Well, it's three o'clock in the morning and Conistone won't disturb you. But keep quiet or you'll disturb Laura. I'll be back in half an hour, ready to be hanged with the rest of you. So, till then."

The two waited while Dr. Cray's heavy tread crunched up the garden path. They heard him knock at the door, saw him bend down his ear to listen. They saw him tap impatiently with one heavy square-toed shoe. Then the door opened, and a fat, blowsy man wavered under the lintel.

"How is Laura?"

"My wife, if thash lady you're referring to, not t' home to callers."

Dr. Cray took his patient's husband by the collar and shook him till his teeth rattled. Then he hauled him out of the doorway, and ran him backward down the garden path, and handed him to Captain Teach.

"If you will cut this sot's throat I would be obliged. If you're not here professionally at the moment, just be a decent man and keep him out of my way till I'm through. Look at your watch. You've given me half an hour, remember. It's a short allowance, but I'll make it do.

"Only mind, don't let William weedle you round. He got a first class in law my year at Harvard, and he'd argue drinks out of the Earl of Hell if the old gentleman only let him talk. Make him drunker, by all means, if you like, but don't let him babble.

"I know you're a gentleman, Teach, as well as a damned pirate, so I ask you personally to see to this."

"Thank you for the confidence," said Teach. "You may rely on it that I will attend to William faithfully, according to

your prescription. And, doctor, if you can't be through with your patient comfortably within half an hour, take a bit more time. I'm sure you won't keep us waiting here longer than is necessary."

"We shall get on together," said Dr. Peter Cray. "Well, good-by for the present."

The village clock announced three-thirty, four, and four-thirty with cold composure. A thin dawn was coloring the ground mist when Cray at last came out of the cottage.

To give William his due, Dr. Cray walked just as shakily. His face was gray and lined, and his big capable hand twittered as he lifted it to his forehead.

"And that's that," he announced. "Now, then, Captain Teach, I am ready to go off and be hanged, when the time comes, with the rest of you. I've nothing here to come back to."

"I thought you was married, sir," said Llewelyn Jones, as they walked off together down the village street toward the creek. "I thought that very attractive lady up at your house was Mrs. Cray."

"She is. Perhaps I should have been more accurate and said there was nothing I wanted to come back to. As a point of fact, my patient, the one that I went to see, was the only woman I ever cared about.

"You may say, if you like, I killed her. Anyway, she did not want to live. You see, she married the bag of liquor who was introduced to you as William. That's quite sufficient reason—if you know William. As for my own be-dyed and be-scented better half, she's much too expensive a luxury.

"So now, my merry pirates, lead on, and let's have as hectic a time as we can while it lasts. If only you can provide me with some surgical practise, that's all I have to ask. I've some things to work out. If we turn off to the left here, that's the nearest way to the boat landing."

Now, to make a dramatic ending to this episode of collecting Dr. Cray, I should end here. But history is dramatic only by accident, and to make my history complete, I must continue further.

At the entrance to the creek Teach gave a word to Llewelyn Jones, rested on his oar, and screwed his neck round seaward.

"Ah," he said.

"I was going to tell you," Dr. Cray commented. "But how did you find out? As we are going to work together, I may as well know the range of your attainments."

"I gave the strictest orders that nobody was to be admitted on board. If anybody came in over Petronella's gangway, he broke a circuit and switched on a small mast-head lamp above her riding light. There it is."

"Jolly cute," said Dr. Cray. "I don't mind telling you now that I put the United States on your track. That bullet-clipped ear of yours gave you away, you know, as well as your general coloring and contour. Otherwise, Furstenburg was good."

"I'm sorry I did it now, because a run in your forty-knot Petronella would have amused me. But a dozen hours ago; a dozen, I say"—Dr. Cray's sigh had a choking throaty quiver in it—"ahum! I'm afraid I sha'n't be much use to you on the lugger without the tools and pills of my trade. Of course, with the carpenter's saw and the cook's knife, and some hot pitch one could do a bit of old-time surgery, but that sort of medieval work goes against the Harvard brain."

"It goes against the board-school nerves as well. That's why I came for you doctor. As regards tools and physic, well, Mr. Furstenburg sent a firm in New York ten one thousand dollar notes for them to express to him a complete outfit of surgical instruments and the balance in drugs for a favorite nephew who had recently set up his shingle ashore, after four years' experience as a war surgeon. This boat's cluttered up with the cases."

"Oh, I saw the cases. But I thought you'd been going through the strong boxes of my neighbors in Conistone, and concluded those were the contents."

The pirate turned round, scowling blackly.

"I am not a pilferer, Dr. Cray. Further, you are one of my officers now, and though I allow every freedom that holds in an ordi-

nary officers' mess, I draw the line at impertinence."

"Oh, sorry," said Peter Cray. "Can you give me a fill of reasonable tobacco for my pipe? I've come away without my pouch. Mind your oar, there, bo, or you'll be foul of that oyster sloop."

The oyster sloop, however, was part of Teach's latest scheme. He jumped from the boat, painter in hand, and passed the end of it round a shroud. He clapped on the forehatch, and snapped the hasp.

Then he ran aft and dived, very quietly for a heavy man, through the narrow companion. Four men snored in four bunks. Teach seated himself on the table and awoke them with a cough. Llewelyn Jones, pistol in hand, stood to attention at the foot of the ladder. Four pairs of eyes unglazed themselves, and stared.

"And who the blazes might you be?" drawled one personage at last.

"You the skipper?"

"Yep."

"I'm Captain Teach. I charter your sloop for one hundred dollars a day for so long as I want her. If you and your crew turn-to and obey orders you'll earn another one hundred dollars. If not, you'll be shot and thrown overboard and the one hundred dollars charter money will be paid to your executors."

"Come, now. What's your choice?"

"There's a lot in what you say," drawled the oyster sloop's skipper. "But a long trip you'll find inconvenient. We've no grub aboard, unless you count in a cargo of oysters, and I wouldn't like to touch an oyster myself. I guess I know too much how they feed to fancy them as food."

"Oysters will do. Now turn out, heave up, and get under weigh. I'm in a hurry."

Three of the four fishermen took little enough pains with the toilet. A pair of boots and a coat apiece attired them for the day. Number four, a lank-haired youth, was a bit of a dandy. He must needs pour unguents on his head before he considered himself equipped for labor.

This adornment was proceeding when Cray came down into the frowzy little cabin. The big doctor had been stolid enough so far. But the scent of the hair

grease stirred some internal string that upset him completely. He flopped to the table, and buried his big head in his arms, whimpering hysterically.

"Hold up, doctor," said Teach kindly. "You'll be all right in a minute."

"That accursed woman always said that if I left her she'd haunt me to the end of my days. And she's doing it. She's doing it. Haven't you got a nose, man? Can't you smell it?"

"She's doing it here and now. Dyed hair, tawdry jewelry, tawdry dress, fool talk, fool ways. Gr-r-r, they'll all come jibbering before me every day I live. I know it. Damnation, yes, I know it."

"But she can't get at Laura again, nor can William. Laura agreed, and we fixed it so. I tell you she agreed. It was the only possible way."

Teach, flinty-hearted pirate that he was, was nearly shocked.

"I can understand your running from that dyed and scented wife of yours, doctor, but dash it all, man, you've never murdered your old sweet heart, have you?"

With a jerk Dr. Cray pulled himself together, and stared coldly at his commander.

"Captain Teach," he said, "I am apparently to be one of your officers. You will find that I do my duty efficiently. You will find also, that I do not try to pry into your private affairs, and that I absolutely decline to allow you to pry into mine."

"I will trouble you for another fill of tobacco—mixture if you have it. I believe I told you I had forgotten to bring along my pouch. Thank you. I detest straight-cut tobacco as a rule, as it is bad for the throat."

NEVER A WOMAN GIVES HER HEART

BY MARY CAROLYN DAVIES

ONE man gives his heart to the sea,
And one to the mountain peak,
One to the mine, where bright rocks shine;
And one goes out to seek,
On the hundred roads of the ribboned earth
One thing by night and day,
And what he seeks may be little worth;
But he is away, away!

One man gives his heart to the sea,
And one to the mountain peak,
And neither listens nor heeds at all,
When the little houses speak,
The little houses with panes alight,
With candles shining far,
With ready hearth-fires glowing bright,
Where the patient women are.

One man gives his heart to the sea,
And one to the mountain peak;
And for all strange treasures that there may be
Over the world they seek.
But the women listen and wait and weep
Bitterly, bitterly;
For never a woman gives her heart
To the mountains or the sea!

So Ends the Day

by J. Allan Dunn.

Author of "The Yellow Fetish," "A Man to His Mate," etc.

CHAPTER I.

UNDERCURRENT.

FROM northeast to southeast, stretching a full quarter of the horizon, lifting high toward the zenith, loomed a somber, chaotic mass; folded and swollen in strange convolutions that slowly changed form, the semblance of some weird land-fall, stricken by convulsions, tumbling reluctantly to ruin. The bulk of it was dull, threatening gray, shadowed with deepest, ominous purple in its cañons and deep caverns, the upper crags touched luridly with the hue of raw copper.

The sea was like a sheet of polished brass, of no color—a glare of reflected light from the sun that was just beginning to wheel westward. It heaved in long, low hills, smooth as the breasts of a golden-skinned *Apsara* dancing-girl. Only beside the bilges of the barkentine, in the scanty shadow of the hull, the water took on tone. There wavering scallops of blue and bronze and green, the prismatic hues of a peacock's tail, glided out in kaleidoscopic patterns, fading in the sunflare without a hint of foam.

On the ship, flying-jib, jib and staysail, fore-skysail, royal and topgallant, drooped, flaccid, waiting for a breeze. The canvas hung from the lower yards of the bore in brails. The mainsail was down, held in loose gaskets, the mizzen set, sheeted-in; both topsails were furled.

The Malay crew, tall and lean, with flattened dish-faces, light bronze of flesh, were setting up the stays of the mainmast, hauling in unison to their low drone of *Bada-ah! Trama, tramah, tra-ma-ah!* Their transparent blue shadows shifted back and forth. Their coarse, black hair was confined in gaudy but sun-faded cloths, tied with prick-ears. *Sarongs* of brown cloth, patterned in red, skirted them to the knees.

Elsewise they were naked, save for the oil that they had anointed themselves with against tissue-smashing rays of the sun. Over them presided their *tindal*, their self-appointed quartermaster; younger, slighter than any of them, but senior, greater in brain; master of their tasks, appointer and often administrator of their punishments.

Over the half-poop deck an awning was stretched from mizzenboom to either rail. Beneath it, on rattan chairs, two women were stretched at full length, one twice the age of the other, both languid in the frightful, nerve-smashing heat of the Banda Sea. A white man leaned against the port rail near the after shrouds, surveying leisurely the younger of the women. Her eyes were half-closed, long lashes entirely shaded them, yet she was quite conscious of his regard, and uneasy under it.

The man, first mate of the vessel, was physically good to look at. He wore a white shirt, open at the throat, the sleeves docked above the elbows, clean duck trousers, with a *cummerbund* of vivid orange

in *flex* of belt, emphasizing the narrowing of his hips beneath his wide chest and broad shoulders.

He was swart with the sun, but there was a tinge of crimson heightening the tan on his cheeks, and his lips were full and red. He was clean-shaven, his hair black and curling, but close-cropped. His nose sprang out aquiline from between dark eyes that gazed on the girl with a look that was provocative, a look that needed little to become possessive.

He was magnificently muscled, and stood the height of a full fathom. There was something of a swagger about him, even in his lounging attitude, something predatory in the grouping of his features.

The girl stirred under his persistent regard, and looked at him. Her hair was pale-gold, her eyes sky-blue, their curving fringes brown. Her skin was cameo-pale with the heat, but her mouth was brightly pink. For all her lassitude she was healthy, full of life and the love of living.

The mate's eyes were fixed on the silk-clad ankles and the graceful swell of what the shifting skirt revealed of her slender legs. Then it traveled appraisingly, boldly admiring, up the slim, rounded length of her, and rested on her face, slowly turning the hue of the inner surface of a pink-lined shell.

"Skipper taking his nap?" he asked.

"He always has his *siesta* at this time," she answered. "You should know that."

"Surely. Regular as a clock, the skipper. Ticking away, day in, day out, always the same, never too fast, always correct, stand-ard time."

"I imagine that is a valuable attribute in a captain," she replied, shifting her look from his with a certain suggestion of effort. The mate smiled with a flash of white teeth.

"Auntie!" The elder woman moaned a little, and answered without opening her eyes, a little petulantly. Little beads of perspiration gleamed on her forehead.

"What is it, Mary?"

"Don't you want to go down into the cabin? It is unbearably hot up here. We can get the boy to start the *puddah*."

The aunt groaned again.

"It can't be worse than it is on deck. The sun pricks my eyes through the lids. I believe that awning makes it worse. Very well." She got up primly, and the girl followed her. Opposite the mate, the latter turned her head toward him, deliberately accepting his challenge. The blue eyes fought the brown, and faltered.

"See you later," he said, and, as she made no answer, moving on, slight, graceful in her white draperies; he smiled again.

In his cabin, off the trade-room, Sykes, the cockney supercargo, was compounding a rum punch for Pinckney, the second-mate, and Evans, the Welsh carpenter. These, with the skipper and the mate, were the only white men aboard the barkentine. The cook was Chinese; all others Malays.

"It ain't wot it ought ter be, wivout hicc," said Sykes. "But the lime takes the bloomin' thirst out of yer, an' the tamarinds sort of puckers up yore cheek kinn's an' cools you orf."

"And the rum leaves you worse off than you was," said Pinckney.

"Want me to leave it out of yore's?" asked Sykes. "I thought not. Well, 'ere's lookin' at yer both."

They half-drained their glasses at a gulp and, almost immediately, the sweat broke out on their foreheads. The Welshman scooped his off with the back of his hand, the other two mopped it up with *bandanas*. All three were in singlets and duck trousers, their feet naked. Overhead was the soft shuffling of the sailors, the faint sound of their chant—*Bada-a-ah! Trama, trama, tra-ma-ah!* Suddenly it was topped by a belloyed order. The shuffling quickened. The chant died out and was not resumed.

"Bullyin' 'em again," said the Welshman. "Just make 'em sullen. He don't know how to handle 'em."

"He's new in these seas," said Pinckney. "Don't see why the skipper picked him."

"'E knows his bizness, outside of that," said Sykes. "And theré hain't much choice of mates these days. They're scarce. The skipper 'ud 'ave myde you 'first,' Pinky, if you c'ud navigate."

"I know it. I'm as high as I'll get. But I'm as good a man as him, outside of shoot-in' the sun. I've had no schoolin'. Nine-

teen years I've bin at sea. I'm thirty now. But I'm a sailorman. Born in me. But no good at figgerin'."

"Yo're a good man, Pinky," said the supercargo. "'Ave another go?"

"No. It's too hot. One's enough. Goes right through you. The old man's goin' to be mortal sorry he shipped Samson as first mate," he went on, nursing his grievance. "For two reasons."

"Wots the other one?" asked the supercargo.

Evans said it. "He don't know how to handle the Malays. Good men, but techy. Some day he's goin' to hit one of 'em, an' then there'll be hell to pay. If a Malay does wrong he can be punished, but the *tindal's* got to do it. They'll stand for Selim, even to a floggin', an' Badoun could crumple him up like I would a bit of paper, but let a white man lay hand to him, an' like as not it means mutiny—or murder."

"Yo're right, Pinky. But that ain't the main reason. It's the gel. The skipper was a fool to let 'er come aboard for the voyage. Wanted 'er to see wot it was like afore he married her—an' she finds it dull. The mate's out to amuse her. He's a handsome devil."

"I heard at Singapore that he run away with his last skipper's wife," said Pinckney.

"Ho. Bazaar-pidgin!" said Sykes scornfully. "Not but wot it might be true. If it was, it warn't our kind of a skipper."

"The skipper's slow but sure," said the Welshman, finishing his glass. "Aye, an' deep. Anger 'll damn him for a bit till he thinks things over, but if the flood breaks through there's a sight of force behind. He's blind in love with the gal. Fair worships her. He looks at her as if she was a bit o' Dresden, an' him proud to own it, but afeard to touch. A man that lives at sea is shy o' wimmen. He sees 'em in visions, in the stars, an' in the clouds, fillin' the wide sea spaces wi' dreams. They're far-off, an' so they're more precious. He treats 'em wi' over reverence—not as they would be treated. But if it's hands off wi' the skipper, wo betide any else that comes too close."

"Where did yer git hall the stuff about wimmin an' the wide sea-spaces?" jeered

the cockney. "For you've spent most of yore life at sea yerself."

"I've been married twice," answered Evans. "And every Welshman is a dreamer an' a poet."

"Specchully arfter a rum-punch."

Evans ignored him.

"The skipper's lost his luck," he went on. Lost it when he changed the name of the ship. Halcyon she was, Mary she is. 'Tis bad luck to shift a ship's name between voyages. He should have married the girl first."

"E's a better man than Samson," said Sykes. "For all the mate's showy looks an' muscles. Shut the two of 'em in a room an' one 'ud come out. It w'udn't be Samson."

"Fightin' ain't makin' love." Pinckney shook his head knowingly. "The Welshman's right. The skipper's a novice beside Samson. The gal's bored. The mate's a woman-killer."

"Mebbe he is," answered Sykes. "But the skipper's a man-tamer."

There came a sudden patter or rain on deck. In a moment it was a torrent, drumming furiously on the planks, hissing in the scuppers.

"We may get a breeze after that," said Pinckney. "It must be close to two bells. My watch."

"Thank Gawd for the rain! I'm fair messy with the 'eat. Let's hall go on deck an' get a shower-barth." And Sykes led the way to the ladder.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECRET FLAME.

CAPTAIN MARTIN, skipper of the Mary—late the Halcyon—stood three inches shorter than his mate. He weighed close to a hundred and eighty pounds of compact flesh and bone, his legs were slightly bowed, his chest deep, his arms as stout as spars. His beard was luxuriant, but he kept it clipped fairly short. Like his hair, it was reddish-brown, only a shade or so deeper than his weathered skin.

Out of it all his eyes gleamed like jewels

inlaid in bronze. They were chameleon eyes, the eyes of a seaman, blue in fair weather, gray in storm. Whenever he looked at Mary Leigh, they held the hue of the shadow of midsea waves under a sunny, cloudless sky. He was perhaps a year or so older than Samson, both around thirty.

The barkentine sailed easily under the stars, the southern cross a glittering pendant over her maintruck, her canvas pyramiding, umber in the shadow, high-lighted to ivory where the rising moon caught it; the harping of the fair breeze in the rigging in harmony with the whispering rush of the water along the vessel's run. A forking wake stretched luminous with phosphor to meet the moon-path. In it a troop of porpoises, hunting their supper acrobatically, turned continuous somersaults, churning the sunshine into green fire. The skipper and Mary Leigh stood at the taffrail.

"Beautiful, ain't it?" he asked. "And a fair wind. We're heading up for Serang, Mary. Like a big garden it is, with a live volcano in the middle. The Spice Islands they call the group; where the nutmegs come from. Nor' an' east of that is the western end o' New Guinea. The Malay's call it the Head of the Dragon. Looks like it on the chart. 'There's where they get the best birds-o'-paradise. Skins like jewels, purple an' green an' reddish-gold. I'm goin' to get you some, Mary."

He slid an arm about her waist. She moved away from the embrace without immediate reply.

"What's wrong, Mary?"

"Nothing. But that man, Badoun, at the wheel?"

"His eyes are in the front of his head, not his back," answered the skipper. But he did not replace his arm.

"Doesn't anything ever *happen* at sea?" she asked him suddenly.

"Lord, yes! Storm and shipwreck, sometimes. But you can fight the one an' dodge the other if you've a good ship an' use judgment. Nothin' you need worry about, my dear."

"Oh, storms! Her voice was petulant.

"I was hoping you'd like it all," he said. She shrugged her shoulders and turned,

facing inboard, back to the rail. Behind Badoun the spark of a cheroot showed. Then the first mate, emerging from the shadows into the spotlight of the moon.

"Great night," he said affably. "Have a cheroot, skipper? You don't object, Miss Leigh?"

"Not at all," the girl answered. The skipper refused the cigar. "Isn't the moon gorgeous?" asked Mary Leigh. Ah her indifference had vanished with the coming of the second male, the formation of the triangle.

"Looks like the inside of a pearl oyster," said Samson. "I've seen it when it looked like the open door of a furnace. I mind one time in the Solomons. I was mate on a recruity schooner. We'd gone ashore in the red boat in the afternoon. They paint all the whaleboats on a recruity scarlet, Miss Leigh, so the natives know what you're after. Saves time.

"Three natives wanted to go with us; we promised 'em trade rifles over and above their wages for a premium, but the chief didn't want to lose 'em. So we fixed it they were to come down to the beach after dark.

"Well, there wasn't any dark. The moon was up before the sun was down. We stood off the island and fetched it again after sunset. The moon showed through the cocopalms on the point like it would set the trees afire. The men were there in the scrub—they were worth twenty pounds apiece to us at the plantation—but just as we're gettin' 'em in the boat the tribe comes down with a rush, an' there we were at it; in the shore-surf, up to our middles, spears flyin', clubs whirlin', pistols poppin' an' flashin' in the shadows. The boat looked more like a porkypine than a boat, time we got clear."

"Were you wounded?" The girl's voice rang eager. The mate showed a scar on his bare forearm, flexing his muscles in the moonlight as she bent to scan it. Her lips were parted, her eyes big with excitement and admiration for this Ulysses of the South Seas.

The skipper, hands buried deep in his pockets, said nothing. He had heard another story about that scar. The girl turned to him.

"That's what I meant," she said. "Excitement! Life!"

"And death," the skipper commented. "No place for a woman."

Samson laughed. "There was another time when we ran on a reef in the New Hebrides," he commenced. "On a little island off Aoba—"

Sykes had come quietly up the poop-ladder and crossed to them. Now he broke in.

"Taku's sick, skipper. "Got a touch of fever."

Captain Martin hesitated.

"I'd better go for'ard and take a look at him," he said.

"I'll wait here," said Mary Leigh. "Mr. Samson will spin me more yarns. Won't you?"

"Were your men Malays, like these aboard?" she asked the mate when he had finished his perilous tale.

"Not them. Melanians. Cannibals, with filed teeth. Huskies. Not molly-coddles, like this lot. The skipper mothers 'em too much, to my fancy." He glanced to see how she took the implied criticism, but she seemed not to have noticed it. They moved to the taffrail.

"The porpoises have gone," she said. "They were like so many animated pin-wheels."

The moon shone full in their faces. The mate never took his eyes from her. He chuckled silently as he thought of her response to his yarning, and now, though eminently conscious of his regard, she did not resent it. The tropic night was full of glamour, the balmy air hinted of the Spice Islands all about them, of great drooping mango-trees heavy with luscious fruit, orchids festooning the fervid bush.

The lure of it was pumping in his veins, and he fancied her blood warming. He glanced at Badoun, like a carven image of ebony at the wheel—save for the play of his arms—thought and action centered on his work, eyes on the compass-card aswim in the light of the binnacle.

"They're off the quarter," he said; "followed up the school of surface fish. See 'em?"

She shifted her position, leaning over

the quarter-rail, one hand on a mizzen backstay.

"I can't. They are too close to the side. I'm not tall enough."

"Want to?"

She nodded, not catching his meaning. He drew a deep breath, and looked again at Badoun.

"Put your elbows to your sides, hold 'em steady."

He gripped her arms at the bend, hot palms to bare, cool flesh that warmed to the contact.

She felt herself hoisted steadily, easily up, till her hips leveled his shoulders, while she held the stay for steadiness. Tingling vitality flowed out of his strength, her blood surged scalding, something of what fevered him transmitted through his clutch; intoxicating, dizzying.

"Put me down," she begged, half gasping.

He set her on the deck and twisted her toward him. She spun, still confused, clinging to him for an instant. He caught at her and crushed her close. As her head fell back he stooped and kissed her. For a moment her body was molded close to his. She could feel the strong beat of her heart through his thin clothing. Then she thrust away.

"How could you? How dare you?" she panted. "Badoun!"

He smiled, and half of it was for that word: "Badoun."

"How could I help but dare?" he demanded, and his voice was husky with passion. But he turned a sharp eye to the Malay. The man's back showed, hardly visible in the shadow, one shoulder sharply accented by the moon.

"He saw nothing," he whispered. "You're not angry? I couldn't help it. God, but you are wonderful! You set me afire."

Her hair had become disarranged, or she chose to think it so. She stood apart from him, both hands busy. Her eyes were hidden under their long lashes, but he marked her bosom lift and fall, saw her underlip caught up by her teeth. His own hands were clenched, the veins high on his temples and in his neck. He made a short

step forward. Her eyes opened. He read fright in them, where he had expected something else, before he realized that she was looking beyond him. Her hands drooped, fell to her sides.

"Nothing much the matter with Taku," boomed the skipper's bass. "The quinine 'll fix him by morning. How's she holding up, Badoun?"

He had turned to the binnacle. But how much had he seen? The mate's face became alert, like the face of a beast that thinks it hears the step of the hunter. Mary Leigh stood as if turned to stone. She was cold, all save her lips.

"Your aunt's comin' on deck, Mary." As the skipper spoke Miss Burton appeared, and the girl went directly to her. Samson faced the captain.

"Man all right, is he? Most of 'em malingersers. Don't pay to baby 'em too much, I've found."

"I'm not apt to serve out pap where it ain't wanted," answered the skipper, with dry emphasis. "I know how to handle my men—and my ship, Mr. Samson." His eyes looked squarely at the mate. They were gray, and cold as steel.

"We're going below, John," Miss Burton said. "I don't trust this night air."

"I shouldn't wonder but what you were right. I'll go with you. Mr. Samson, will you please take the deck?"

It was not the mate's watch for a full hour, but he said nothing. After the deck was clear, save for him and Badoun, he lit a fresh cheroot, but did not find it to his taste, tossing it into the sea and pacing from port to starboard and back again. He had made up his mind that the skipper had seen nothing. If he had he would not have stood tamely by. Unless the presence of both the women had restrained him.

The girl, with her fresh coolness, her difference from the longshore women he had known, had maddened him, but he had gone willingly along that path. He had learned, with his knack of piecing such things, that Mary Leigh had a tidy little fortune in her own right.

He compared himself complacently with the skipper, remembering the moment when her body had yielded.

She had not returned his kiss, but she had suffered it. It had roused her, swept her off her feet, if only for a second. He had made the first step successfully. But the path was dangerous. The skipper was not a fool, not a man who let his rights slide. What if Badoun had seen and told? The Malays were crafty, and their senses were abnormal. He itched to question the man, but checked himself.

"I'll wager he's never got under her skin," he assured himself. "As for the two of us, it's man to man—and may the best win." And he let his thoughts slide to pleasanter prospects. He saw himself owning his vessel, as Martin owned the Mary, making a good income out of her, cruising, prosperous among the islands. But there was no image of Mary Leigh in the cabin of his ship.

"I'll not be fool enough to take *her* to sea," he told himself, with a muttered laugh, as he found a third cheroot to his taste, and lounged by the taffrail, sending out puffs of fragrant smoke into the air that were wafted to the sensitive nostrils of Badoun, making them quiver, like the nostrils of a dog.

But Badoun had seen nothing, whatever he had sensed. And, if he had seen, he would not have told the captain.

Presently, Sampson slipped below to his cabin. As he passed down the poop-ladder he glimpsed the figures of Miss Burton and the skipper in the cuddy, built under the poop for dining and general assembly room. The girl was not with them.

He descended to the lower cabin, and saw the door of her state-room closed, going on to his own. There he unearthed a bottle of whisky from underneath the mattress of his bunk, and took a long drink, filling a flask to take on deck. Inside of an hour he had finished it.

His reveries had become inflamed, the liquor had fed his sensuous thoughts, never very dormant. When he tossed the last drops down and put away the flask in his trousers pocket for future tipplings, he was in a glow of confidence, sure of conquest, sneering at the chances of the skipper against such a man as he was: Don Juan of a score of lax seaports.

Elizabeth Burton was what Samson would have styled an old maid. The preservation of her virginity had not been from choice. She was well aware that she had been denied the outward and visible charms of her sex, cursed with a dull eye, a dry and sallow skin, a body denied all curves. Equally she knew herself blessed with a nature at once loving and maternal, possessing the intuitions of her sex, where man was concerned, as fully as her niece, and, added to them, deductions derived from observation of the experiences of others.

Between attributes and drawbacks, she managed to preserve a happy balance. She had some of the unavoidable traits of the spinster, but they were not of the spirit. Perhaps because she had never known fruit of her own ripening, had never felt the *ennui* of love, she was the more interested in other folk's plantations.

Her soul had not shriveled; her common-sense matched her good nature. If her life had not been rounded-out according to the law of sex, she had achieved a very satisfactory oval. And she had fully countenanced and encouraged the suit of her niece by Captain Martin.

Mary Leigh had retired with a headache promptly upon going below. But her aunt remained to chat with the skipper. While he smoked she sewed under the cuddy lamp and led the talk around her subject. Yet she felt that she broached it clumsily at last.

"What happened on deck, John?" she asked.

Martin had seen nothing of the embrace. But he had sensed, with a lover's quickness, the tension between the two he had left chatting, left reluctantly. He knew his own failings in light speech, he was envious of Samson's facility. A seed of jealousy had been already planted, and, as he heard the sibilance of the mate's whisper while he had been mounting the ladder, a tendril had been flung up and out, coiling about his heart. Now he turned squarely to the spinster.

"What do you mean?"

"Between Mary and Samson."

"I saw nothing."

"There was something. Mary thinks

you know. She thinks you should have acted."

"Did she tell you?" His voice deepened, quickened. "Never mind, I don't want to know—from you."

"She did not tell me. It was not necessary. You love her, John?"

He looked at her. She nodded at him.

"Mary is only a girl, John. You know how she lived with me. Never seeing any one worth while, any one of interest. She loved you for the you that is inside, hidden. She doesn't realize that as yet. She loved you for what you stood for, romance, the high seas, adventure, strange places. She was like a child with a book. She admired the pictures first; the sound-sweetness of the tale she had yet to learn to read. She was untouched by passion. You were the first man who ever kissed her. You haven't followed up that kiss, John. You treat her more like a big brother than a lover."

"I haven't had much experience in that myself, Elizabeth. I have seen rough things, done them. There is a side to my life far apart from hers."

"Not if you love each other. Not if she is to be your mate."

"She is—Elizabeth, she is the woman of my sea-visions. Like a flower. I have feared to let myself go. I can talk to you. You understand. There is nothing of the prude about you. If I showed her all I felt, if I could tell her? I am no iceberg, but I am crude. I might frighten her. She would not understand. 'She is dauntless.'"

"She is asleep. Or was. Wake her up. Frighten her, if you can. But—love her. John, I know Mary. She is ripening to womanhood. Young love, young passion, first aroused, often mistakes glittering pinchbeck for gold that may be pure, yet unpolished."

She had laid aside her sewing, and her pale eyes lost their dulness. They shone with earnestness. The cuddy door was open for air, and a step sounded on the ladder. She stopped speaking until Samson came back again, and they heard him above them. And she watched the skipper.

As she had said, she knew her niece, she had seen signs that night that told her of sex aroused. And not by Martin. She

wondered if she had spoken too openly. He had not failed to understand. She could tell that by the way he sat biting at the amber of his pipe, gone out. She knew the riddles of his eyes, though she could not always read them. There was a depth to his nature she had never sounded, but suspected. It was strength, but she feared it, if perverted. Under his repression the man was volcanic.

He refilled and relit his pipe.

"Thanks, Elizabeth," he said. "I'll not pretend to misunderstand you. Samson is a good deal of a skunk, but I can handle him."

She gathered up her sewing and rose, as he did.

"Man-handle, you mean. What sense is there in disposing of the man if you lose the girl? Good-night, John."

She looked in at Mary. The moon touched one pillow, with a braid of hair, light gold. The girl's eyes were closed, and she went out softly. But Mary Leigh was not asleep. She was less certain now that Martin had seen. She had lain waiting for the sound of angry voices, waiting for her aunt to come to bid her good night, but she shrank from discussion. Despite the warm, tropic night, she was cold, all but her lips.

Something had suddenly sprung up within her. For one moment, when she had shrunk against the mate's body and received his lips on hers, her flesh and blood had transmuted into flame.

John had never affected her like that. Was there something lacking? Was she tainted with some streak of immorality to remember such a moment and thrill to it? She was plighted to John, but John did not rouse her to such a supreme moment that hinted of deeper transports to which her will and body had leaped.

Was John cold? Were they mismated? Was Samson the one man, as he had been the only one, who could fill her with such delirious desire? She was no simpering innocent, but passion had been born in her for the first time that night; she, a plighted girl, in the arms of another man than her lover. Surely she loved John? Her mind did—or was it only respect?

Fairly in the coils, she tossed on her bed. Behind it all lay dread. A sickening fear of what might happen between the two men.

Pinckney, the second mate, who was to take the middle watch, was, as usual, in the congenial company of the supercargo and the Welshman, in Sykes's snug domain off the trade-room. The three ate at second-table, and, always somewhat embarrassed by the presence of two women aboard, one of them the skipper's *fiancée*, were glad to do so, keeping away almost entirely from the cuddy, where, as one of the few whites aboard, the carpenter, with the others, usually had right of entrance.

The skipper broke in on their three-handed game of cribbage.

"The watches have been shifted a bit, Pinckney," he said. "You'll go up at two bells and relieve the mate. I'll take the deck for the morning watch, as usual."

"Very well, sir." The skipper nodded curtly to Sykes and Evans, and, without his usual pleasant word, left them.

"My eye!" ejaculated Sykes, when he was sure the skipper was well away. "Somethin' stirrin'. Wot-ho for ructions!"

"Samson!" said Pinckney prophetically.

"Somethin' in the bloomin' wind," said Sykes. "And the mate to loo'ard. 'Arf a quid yo're right, Pinkey."

"I'd be a fool to bet against what I think," said the Welshman. "Your deal, Sykes. It's none of our business."

The skipper returned to the cuddy, smoking pipe after pipe and brooding, brooding over what the aunt had told him, retrieving past incidents, cursing above his breath at last to find that he had nothing tangible for open grievance.

"I'll get rid of him at Singapore," he muttered, and reached into the table drawer for the log. There was little to enter save the position, already jotted down in pencil. He was never prolix.

He wrote in his precise hand:

Becalmed all day. A fair wind at sunset. Taku sick with fever. Not serious. Administered 15 gr. quin. At noon: 5' 10" South. 134° 27' East.

The cuddy clock chimed eight bells, midnight. Forward, one of the watch

echoed the strokes upon the ship's bell. He added the invariable formula, old as the first merchantman manned by English sailors:

So ends this day.

CHAPTER III.

MUTINY.

AN hour later he was still there, the lamp turned low. He saw Pinckney mount the ladder after the clock had chimed two bells, heard him on deck, then another tread, and saw, against the flood of moon that now washed the main deck, the tall figure of Samson descending.

The mate hesitated outside the dimly-lit cuddy, then turned in. He had his own log to write up. The skipper turned up the wick of the lamp, and the two men faced each other. The reek of liquor was distinct. Anger, long groping for pretext, flared up in the captain.

"I don't like my officers drinking on duty," he said. "There's no harm in a dram, for entertainment, or in emergency, but, outside of that, it's against my orders."

Samson, his brain fumed with the liquor, his sneering mood toward the skipper still uppermost, said nothing, but his look was eloquent of resentment. Martin's tone had cut like the lash of a whip.

"And I won't have you bullying the Malays," went on the skipper. As his choler rose he smothered it with the ice of his outer mood. "As you have done. You're new to these seas, or you'd have more sense. A free Malay will not tolerate it. Neither will I."

"Free Malay, hell!" drawled Samson. "A loafing lot of scum."

"That is enough, sir. I am the judge of discipline on this ship. I own her."

"The hell you do? Own all aboard her? Perhaps not as much as you fancy you do."

A red light danced in the cold steel of the captain's eyes.

"Just what do you mean?" he asked, evenly.

Samson leered.

"You know damned well what I mean."

The table was between them. The red

spark grew to a flame as the skipper vaulted across it, straight for Samson. The mate caught the heavy inkstand and hurled it. It hit the captain's foot, and the contents spurted over the table and the red carpet. Then Samson staggered back from the impact of the skipper's bulk, striking out at him as he went. The blow glanced off Martin's muscle-sheathed arm, and the next second the two had closed, reeling about the cabin.

The skipper's volcano had seethed over. Yet he fought coolly, his determination made. The chance had offered; he would show the mate *once* and for all who was the better man. They smashed against the table, hurling it to one side as each strove for a fair blow.

There were some antiquated cutlasses in a rack on the mast, with a native *bris* or two. The guns were kept in the main cabin, and in Sykes's quarters, a pistol for each of the white men, never used aboard the Mary.

The skipper's weight and push bore back the mate against the mast, and he grasped a Malay knife, curving, keen. His arm swept up, and the captain pounced upon his wrist, bending down with resistless force, down, and back, until the mate yelled with pain, and the weapon fell to the floor.

The skipper kicked it under the table with his heel, and sent in a slogging blow that caught the dodging mate high on the cheek, bringing a red flush that would soon turn to an angry bruise.

It was delivered with all his strength, backed by his weight, and it temporarily stunned Samson.

In a flash the captain's arms were about him, under his own, compressing his chest. He flogged and thrashed, but he was helpless in the grip that was strong and merciless as that of a bear. The strength oozed out of him. His ribs cracked, his lungs were constricted until he could taste blood in his throat. Red waves of it rolled in front of him. The cuddy reeled.

He came to lying across the table, breath a pain, his limbs still pithless; the skipper standing by with folded arms, his breath even, his gaze sardonic.

"Get up and down to your bunk," said

Martin. "After this, perhaps you'll know that I'm master aboard this ship. I could have crushed you like an eggshell in the fist. Get out!"

The mate gathered himself together, and obeyed, his head still fuzzy with blood pressure, his knees wobbly. His brain at once shouted for revenge and bade him go cautiously.

He had met his master in fair fight, and he knew it. He slunk out of the cuddy like a whipped dog, with a snarl he took care the skipper should not see. Sore in soul and body, he finished his bottle in his bunk.

The heat had flattened out the sea as an iron presses linen. It lay unwrinkled, with the barkentine in the midst of it, motionless as a toy model glued to canvas. The horizon was a sharp line of purple against the lighter sky. No bird vexed the windless air.

Cleaving the surface of the water with barely a ripple, the simitar-shaped dorsals of two sharks kept patrol at the stern, passing from quarter to quarter, ranging ceaselessly after possible scraps of waste. The hatches and bulkhead doors were open, for ventilation.

Breakfast was a farce so far as eating was concerned, lacking even the pantomime of perfunctory performance. Samson did not appear. Neither Mary nor her aunt had caught any sounds of the fight, but both suspected that something of the sort had occurred. Their eyes met and exchanged agreement concerning the skipper's attitude.

He was undeniably sleepy, and announced his determination for a *siesta*. And he was also undeniably in a satisfied frame of mind. He even breathed like a man who has come up from close atmosphere to free air. And the two women had not discussed between themselves the previous night's incidents, yet, in their sex freemasonry, they traded semiconfidences.

It was the first mate's watch on deck, a perfunctory job under the circumstances, but none the less peremptory. He had opened a fresh bottle to aid him to ignore the bruise showing plainly on his cheek.

To him it seemed to blazon the fact of his encounter with the skipper. He himself would have boasted of it to the girl, had he been in the skipper's shoes, and he could not convince himself that the captain had kept silence.

He resented the covert looks of the crew, and he found them numberless tasks. They obeyed them in silence. One order, given through Badoun, was the flushing of the decks every hour with seawater drawn from overside in buckets, hauled in by ropes.

In the cuddy, the skipper left for his cabin, to catch up his needed sleep. Miss Burton languidly asked for the *punkah-boy*, and took up her sewing. - The girl was too restless for any repose, still bothered with her own problem. She was dressed in the lightest of her tropic outfit, and she wandered out on the deck.

The mate was the only white man in sight. He had his back turned to her, and kept it so, as if to avoid her. She sauntered around the mainmast to confront him casually, piqued by his attitude.

She was uncorseted, and the long curves and rounded swells of her almost perfect body were covered, rather than clothed, by the thin Madras of her gown, and the light silks beneath. She became aware of a quality in the attitude of the Malays that offended her. They never seemed deliberately to look at her, but she was continually conscious of glances shot from the corners of long-slitted lids, glances that leered, sweeping her from head to foot.

Once in a while she caught a confidential look pass between two of them, polishing brass or recoiling halyards, and felt that she was the subject. Once, as she paused by the rail, she noticed Badoun deliberately gloating over the sharp shadow of her profiled body on the deck.

It sickened her, made her a little afraid. This had never happened before. It was as if she had been living among men now suddenly revealed: as pit-devils, treacherous and lecherous beneath their light copper skins. Suddenly apprehension swept over her.

Had she suddenly fallen in the estimation of the Malays? She knew how lax was their own morality, their polygamous

practises; she knew how high they esteemed the virtue of the white woman. Did they sense something of what had passed between her and the mate, and, magnifying it, rate her as a light woman, forfeiting their respect?

She raised her head indignantly to see Badoun observing her, and stared him down with haughty pride, passing on to Samson's side.

The bruise instantly caught her eye, and fascinated her. The mate was dressed with unusual care. His fresh linen trousers were starched and even creased, thanks to Quong; his shoes had been newly pipe-clayed, his silk shirt was immaculate. His *cummerbund* sash was the vivid color of a pomegranate bloom.

He looked at the girl with swift suspicion. If she ignored his disfiguration, he told himself, the skipper had got in his own story concerning it. The suggestion that the captain had caused it did flash into her mind, but her lashes shut off any revelation as she slashed at the knot that puzzled the thread of her thought.

• "Did you run into a spar?" she asked with a smile.

The mate's face cleared.

"Just that," he answered. "Hardly improves my figurehead, does it?"

"It will soon go away." She knew that he lied, and curiosity tore at her to know the details of the fight she was sure had happened. Happened on her account.

Four bells chimed, and Badoun gave an order. The men stopped their other work, and commenced flushing the deck, avoiding the immediate space about the girl and the mate. But one Malay was careless, and allowed the rim of his bucket to strike the rail as he inhailed. A little fountain of water splashed up and wetted the girl's skirt. The man caught hastily at his pail, tilted it, and spilled all the contents, soaking the mate's immaculate shoes and the bottoms of trousers.

Samson choked back a curse on account of the girl, and then let loose the mental bile that had been accumulating since his quarrel with the skipper. His lips curled back, and he kicked viciously, expertly, with all his force at the Malay, sending him

sprawling on the deck, springing after him and kicking him again, deliberately and foully—though this the girl did not guess. As the anguished wretch rolled on the planks the mate followed him up.

"You clumsy, yellow-pelted Mohammedan hound," he said in a voice whose concentrated fury amazed the girl, unrealizing his long hours of brooding and drinking, "the next time I'll skin the hide from you!"

Her mind was set for some spontaneous outburst, knives flashing in rising mutiny, and she glanced about her for her best move. But no one appeared to have noticed the incident. The man got himself under control, and picked up his bucket, limping away to the farther rail while the mate stood by sneering.

"Yellow curs, that's what they are! And that's the only way to treat 'em. Looked for an explosion, didn't you? The skipper handles 'em like so much dynamite. Plain mud, that's what they are."

For the first time she caught the taint of whisky on his breath. She was neither prepared to defend the skipper nor listen to any slur upon him, and she made the excuse of changing her gown to leave Samson and go below.

At *tiffin* Samson joined the first table. His mind was filled with revenges against the skipper, with the girl as the one best outlet through which he could achieve them. He attempted to hold her in conversation, hoping to annoy both the skipper and the spinster.

To his surprise the former opened up the talk and kept it going, none too fluent, but persistent, giving the details of a trip of his ashore on Celebes as guest of a *raja*, hunting *seladang* bison from the pad of an elephant.

The mate attempted some cleverly sarcastic remarks, but the girl did not rise to them, and the skipper plowed on through his yarn unstirred. The meal over, the mate went below, and the two women soon followed, hoping for some sort of a doze in the privacy of their cabins, where superfluous clothing could be dispensed with.

The skipper smoked a cheroot in the cuddy, and then applied himself, despite

the heat, to his hobby, the correction of charts of the Java, Flores, Banda, and Arapura Seas. Pinckney held the deck until the first dog-watch, when Samson would relieve him, from four until six.

At two o'clock Sykes came on deck to go fishing in the bows, not from much hope of getting any fish, welcome as they would be, but from sheer desperation. Pinckney joined him. The crew squatted about in such shadow as they could find. Evans was tinkering somewhere below decks.

"What kind of lingo are they jabbering in?" Pinckney asked Sykes. The Malays were in small groups about the decks, talking in low tones, with an animation unusual for such weather.

"Harsk me somethin' heasier," replied Sykes. "I know Malay pidgin an' some Bengalee, but I can't savvy that dialect. The whole bilin' of 'em are on deck, too, watch-below an' all."

"Fo'c'sle must be a reg'lar furnace," suggested Pinckney.

"I s'pose so." The hot afternoon droned on without a flutter of canvas, without a puff of wind or the gathering of a cloud in the sky. In the cuddy the skipper found his moist hands interfering with his task, and stretched himself on a lounging-chair. Presently Miss Burton and her niece joined him, both pale, from the steady heat.

The *punkah*-boy was dismissed, for the disturbance of the heated air only increased discomfort. Blinds were drawn over the skylight, and the cuddy was too dusky for reading or work.

The two women lay on their rattan couches, silently hoping for a breeze, for rain, for any relief against the terrible oppression and temperature that seemed to drain their bodies to the point of exhaustion, relaxed, thoughtless.

Pinckney left Sykes to hand over the deck to the first mate, and then went back into the bows. They had caught three flying-fish, and believed the capture augured a change in the weather, besides promising a change of diet. Samson glanced aloft, sailor-fashion, and instantly noted that the clewlines of the main royal were hanging loose, as if the quarter-blocks had frayed

them. There had been no wind to accomplish this, and he strode to the bows.

"The main-royal clewlines are loose, Pinckney," he said. "Didn't you notice them?"

"No, I didn't," answered Pinckney, nettled at his tone. "They were all right when I took the deck. 'Chafed with the roll of the ship, I s'pose.'"

"Might have," admitted Samson, and ordered Badoun to send two men aloft to reeve fresh lines.

Mary Leigh came out of the cuddy, unable to bear its confinement any longer. The mate noticed her out of the tail of his eye, but affected not to do so as he watched the two Malays, climbing nimbly, one of them the man called Telak, the one whom he had kicked.

Badoun saw her. She felt his glance upon her, in a sort of compelling hypnosis. His eyes, usually as impassive as dull jet, showed smoldering sparks. They made her shiver. Her whole being was depressed, nervously apprehensive of something about to happen. Badoun, eyeing her covertly, seemed careless to mask a mood half sensuous, appraising, insulting. Yet there was nothing openly to resent. She moved on closer to Samson.

The two sailors had halted at the main-top, and shifted to the mainyard at the slings. The girl saw them peering down at the mate like resentful apes.

"The royal, the royal, you pair of jibbering *orangs*!" he suddenly bellowed up at them. "Blast your yellow hides, do you have to make me come up there and show you how to do it?"

Mary Leigh saw Badoun, the smoldering sparks in his eyes changed to flame, set his silver whistle, his *serang's* pipe, to his lips, and blow a shrill call. Instantly the two Malays dropped like cats out of the rigging, fairly upon the struggling mate. The crew, transformed from quiet sailors to Malays gone suddenly *amok*, came leaping from every direction.

They made no sound, but the astounded girl, held in a strange paralysis of inaction, saw the white roll of their eyes, the flash of their teeth as they grinned, the gleam of *krises*. She heard the mate's oath as he

fought helplessly against his captors, she saw Badoun advancing toward her with the face of a devil!

She tried to scream, but her parched throat failed her. At last she forced from it a hoarse cry that, by some weird fantasy, appeared to have been made by some one else. The mate was being dragged forward. They were to starboard. She had a dim impression of Pinckney and Sykes springing from the bows, clubbing their way aft along the port side, the sight of their fighting hidden and the sound of it muffled by the screening canvas.

Badoun's arm reached out. She shrank back, galvanized into action, yet weak from terror and the swift precision with which the open mutiny had started. Again she screamed.

A great bulk leaped past her. It seemed as if the wind of its passing swept her to one side. Her faculties returned with a gasp of relief as she saw the skipper. His face was set with furious resolution, his forehead seemed made of stone plates beneath which his eyes flared like blue steel under the sun, the hard line of his jaw showed under his beard.

One blow from his left fist sent Badoun sprawling over the hatchway, collapsing into the slack of the mainsail, his knees caught at their bend by the boom.

Then, with a roar, the skipper sprang upon the men who were dragging off the mate. He had come weaponless from the cuddy, but he caught up a belaying-pin from the rail at the foot of the mainmast and smashed it down upon the skull of the nearer Malay. The man collapsed. The other let go of the mate, ducked under the skipper's blow, and ran in with his *kris*. The skipper bent his body, supple for all its weight, caught *kris* and forearm between his own left arm and his chest, and once more brought down the metal club.

He glanced over his shoulder. Badoun had got himself together again. Four Malays were closing in from the bows. There was a fight going on by the companionway.

"Get back to the cuddy, Mary!" shouted the skipper. "Quick—while we hold them off. Samson, get a pin!"

But Samson had already retreated, rush-

ing past the girl, who stood undecided. The Malays charged. One of the stunned men was coming to. The odds were impossible. She saw Badoun on the hatchway ready to spring on the captain, and shrieked a warning.

"Back," roared the skipper. His hand shot up and tilted a boat in its davits, clutching for an oar. He needed to lengthen his arm, the belaying-pin was no match for so many knives. He swept the stout ash about him as the girl at last obeyed him. Badoun got the thrust of the blade in his chest, and once more toppled, the rest, crowding aft, hesitating before the swing of the oar as the skipper charged, and then, still facing them, took great strides backward.

The girl was in the cuddy-door. Pinckney and Sykes had broken through their gauntlet with the penalty of flesh wounds from which both were bleeding. But they were hard pressed, and the skipper covered his retreat for the moment with his flail-like weapon. A shot came up the companionway. Instantly the Malays closed and secured the door, while Sykes and the second mate, the skipper last, gained the cuddy. The whole mad mêlée had lasted less than three minutes, and it left the crew in possession of the deck. Evans in the main cabin—the two women, the skipper, both the mates, and Sykes, shut up in the little cabin beneath the poop.

There were shutters to the skylight, shutters to the windows, placed for protection against Malay pirates when the barkentine was new to those seas. These they closed and made fast with bolts. The cuddy door was halved, Dutch-fashion, and it was also pierced, like the window shutters, with loopholes for guns. But all the pistols, a rifle and a shotgun, were in the main and sleeping-cabins with Evans. He might defend himself with them, they were useless to the holders of the cuddy. The only light that now came in to them was through the square ports in the stern.

The skipper swiftly took cutlasses from the rack about the mizzen, and laid them on the table, testing their edges, and shaking his head at the result.

"They'll be at us with the axes," he

said. "We'll have to tackle 'em as they come in. Take your choice." He selected his own, and swung it through the air, making the steel sing with the cleaving stroke. "Badly hurt?" he queried at Sykes and the second mate. Miss Burton had quietly started to do what she could for them, the girl assisting her. They tore strips from their white petticoats for bandages.

"Nothink to fuss habout," said Sykes. "W'ot in 'ell started it?"

"They were after me," said Samson. He was fiddling with the cutlasses. In the dusk of the cuddy his brown face seemed a trifle gray. Mary Leigh noticed that his hand shook as he lifted a weapon. The skipper went to the door and glanced out through a loophole. The Malays were all jabbering amidships. All save the first man he had hit with the belaying-pin.

"Eleven to four of us," he muttered, half to himself. "We can't count on Evans. They've got him out of it."

"Is there any way to get into the main cabin through this?" asked the girl, tapping with her foot upon a trap, outlined beneath the cuddy matting.

"No," answered the skipper. "Leads into the lazaretto. There's a bulkhead between that and the cabin. Locked with hasps that bolt clean through the teak. And the keys in my pocket. If any one could get through it 'ud be Evans, if he happened to think of it. And it 'ud take him an hour. They'd rush him. This thing will be settled before dark. If it isn't— I wonder what the devil they are up to?" he barked irritably.

"What about Quong?" asked the girl.

"You needn't worry about him. He's half Malay, anyway. If they force his hand he'll join. Here comes Badoun."

CHAPTER IV.

"SO ENDS THIS DAY."

HE had spoken with an eye fast to the loophole. His thoughts were gloomier than they showed in his voice. The Malays had got hold of axes. He feared an attack on the cuddy after dark. He feared that the crew might set

fire to the ship, if resistance was too strenuous and costly to their side, leaving, then, in the boats. He feared the heat, thirst, hunger. He thought of a *sortie*, but to emerge through the cuddy-door would mean that they would be cut down by men who could stand beside the opening and hack at them. And, if the men were killed— what of the women? He thrust that lead aside, welcoming the sight of Badoun.

From somewhere the *serang* had produced a Malay sword. The skipper thought grimly of the motto—*strip a Malay and you'll always find a kris*. The crew were supposed to come aboard unarmed, but they had had plenty of opportunities to smuggle in their knives, and had, as usual, availed themselves of them.

With his sword in his hand, Badoun advanced aft, two of his men, carrying axes as well as their *kris*es, close behind him. These he posted by the companion hatch, evidently to guard against any attempt from Evans to break through from below.

It was plain that Badoun was leader. The *tindal* ruled the men as arbiter of their own regulations, but Badoun was the fighting man. He glanced at the cuddy-door, where the gleam of the skipper's eye must have been visible. His face was cruel and confident. Opposite the door he stopped and hailed the skipper.

"Tuan, let me speak along of you. I wish you no harm. See."

He laid sword and *kris* back of him on the hatchway, and stepped closer to the door.

"Stand back," said the skipper to those in the cuddy. "I'm going to talk with him."

He flung open the other half of the door.

"Now then, Badoun, what is the meaning of this? It's mutiny on the high seas. You'll hang for it."

"I think not, Tuan." Badoun spoke in musical sing-song, but there was menace in the tone—menace, and assurance. "We not want harm you, or ship. We want Samsoni. Suppose you give us him, all right, we take him. We go in boats. Go now, before wind come."

"Suppose you no give us Samsoni," he went on, "then we kill all of you. We kill all the men. We kill all the women—"

after little while," he added with an emphasis that made the two women shudder, and set the skipper's blood to boiling."

"You talk like a foolish man, Badoun. Suppose you kill, you hang. Always I have treated you right." It was hard to get conviction into his words. He knew that if the Malays got clear in the boats it was not far to land, where the bush would swallow them. "Why do you want Mr. Samson?"

At that one of the men by the companion sprang forward. It was the one the mate had foully kicked. Even now he limped, and his face was convulsed with rage. He broke into a volley of Malay. The skipper stopped it with a bellowed command, backed by Badoun, who put his hand on his fellow's naked chest and pushed him away.

"You hear what he say?" said Badoun. "Better you give him up, Tuan. We sure get him. We kill all. I think perhaps we not kill women; we take along in boat. What you speak, Tuan?"

"No!" roared the skipper, and slammed the door. Sweat shone on his face, his eyes were troubled.

"Pretty soon two bells strike, Tuan," persisted the *serang*. "Much better you change your mind before that time."

The eyes of all of them swung to the cuddy clock. It was twenty minutes to three.

"Pinckney," said the skipper curtly. "See if there is a sail in sight, or any sign of wind?" The second mate looked out through the after ports.

"Nothing," he said simply.

Samson had turned to Sykes.

"What did he say?" he asked. His lips were dry, and he licked at them. The supercargo surveyed him contemptuously. His dislike of the mate boiled over.

"He says you kicked Telak, and they're goin' to carve the bloody 'eart out of yer. Unless we give you hup!"

"I gave you my orders about mistreating the men, Samson," said the skipper accusingly.

"Now you've brought us to a hard pass."

There was silence in the cuddy, save for the suave ticking of the clock, beating out

the seconds that lay between them and death—for the women, worse..

"Give 'im hup, I say," said Sykes. The skipper frowned at him, but he paid no attention. "It's 'im or the rest of us," went on the supercargo. "And then," he jerked his head at the two women. "No time to be mealy-mouthed. 'E did it. They've got us, sooner or later. Listen to 'em jabberin'."

The Malays had evidently come aft, assembling outside the little cuddy.

"Between him and the women," said Pinckney. "I votes *him*."

The skipper looked from the mate to Mary Leigh. She was deathly pale, her eyes fixed on the mate. Then they shifted to him. But he could read nothing in them but dumb entreaty. Her aunt had taken up a *kris* from the rack, her face set in strained resolution.

Suddenly Samson broke down.

"My God!" he said, and the hand he held out shook like a leaf in the wind. "You're not going to give me up, to them? They wouldn't keep their word. They'd—Mary—you—you—?"

The skipper's face hardened at the *Mary*. He seemed to be waiting for a sign from the girl. But she, too, appeared to hold back for his decision. It was up to him, the commander. He knew Badoun, he felt certain that they would, at that moment, be satisfied with the body of the mate. Later—? His eyes roamed about the cabin. The hands of the clock had passed on to twelve minutes past five. Twelve minutes. His face became a carving of stone save for the almost imperceptible movement of his lips.

"We'll not give you up," he said, and the contempt in his voice held the sting of a whip-lash. "White men don't work that way. Nor white women, I fancy."

A glance came over the face of the girl. It was radiant as she gazed at the skipper. But he did not see it. He was opening the locked drawer of the cabin, taking from it a little case, that contained his drugs. As they watched him, fascinated, he took up with steady hand a vial half-filled with white pellets. Two of these he dropped into his palm.

"We've got a show," he said. "If we take them by surprise. Samson, I suppose you are willing to fight for your life? You're in a corner?" The inference was plain in the scornful tone. Samson winced.

"I'll fight," he said suddenly.

"All right. They are all on the main deck. We'll go out through those ports, over the taffrail to the poop. If they hear us—there's the end of it! It's three to one. I'll take you, Samson. Pinckney, you and Sykes take the port ladder. We'll take the starboard. On the word, we'll charge 'em. If we can throw the bolts off the companionway and hold off until Evans gets to us with a gun or two, we've won. If not—?"

He shrugged his shoulders and turned to the two women.

"Close those after-ports when we're through. Keep the cuddy closed. You can watch, if you want to. If they get us—put out your hands."

They extended their palms. They trembled a little as the skipper put into each of them a pellet.

"Cyanide," he said. "I don't need to tell you what to do. Nor when. You'll never know—" His deep voice faltered, and the sweat ran down his face like a stream. He took half a step toward Mary, and checked himself. "We've just got five minutes," he said. "Out with you and go like snakes. I'll give the word. When they hear the cabin clock they'll break all hell loose. So if we're to win out, we must get the jump on them."

There were four of the stern ports, and each opened inward. The four men sat on the sills, cutlasses beneath their teeth. They reached up to the taffrail, hoisted themselves, feet on the frames. Then, with a spring and a flexing of muscles, they were up and gone, gliding over the rail to the deserted deck, where the idle wheel swung between spokes.

In the cuddy the two women, each with a pellet of death clutched in her palm, closed the windows. Beyond, the two sharks were trailing back and forth in the wake. The women looked at each other, blanched, listening for some sound above, watching the hands of the clock.

7 A

Two to starboard and two to port, the four white men writhed over the planks. At the break of the poop they rose to all-fours, still out of sight from below. A shot was heard. Evans was firing at random through the main skylight. If he would understand when they opened the companion, if he had guns ready, they might win through.

Five chiming strokes sounded from beneath them, blending with fainter tinkles from the clock in the main cabin. There was a crash of wood under an ax blow. The skipper leaped to his feet, cutlass gripped.

"Now!" he yelled, and vaulted the poop rail while the rest bounded down the ladders.

There was a moment or two of scythe-like strokes as the cutlasses rose and fell. The Malays, taken by utter surprise, massed confusedly. The skipper won through to the companion and backed to it, his left hand fumbling for the bolts while he exchanged blows with Badoun, fighting like a disappointed fiend.

"Evans!" he roared. And his great bass, that could top a gale, boomed vibrant. "Up! With the guns!"

Badoun's sword swept in a feinting circle about the skipper's clumsier weapon. But the captain's fury matched the Malay's speed. His cutlas thrust aside the steel, and, as the *serang* leaped back, the skipper lunged. The cutlas blade entered Badoun's chest, deep, with the blood spurtling as the Malay reeled. And the bolts had been slipped.

Behind the skipper the companion doors slid back, a pistol barked, Telak fell writhing, Evans leaped out, thrusting a revolver into the skipper's ready hand, handing a shotgun at Sykes. Pinckney stooped and gathered up another pistol that lay on the top of the ladder.

The crew fell back at the fall of Badoun and Telak. The shot, the sight of the guns, swept the madness from their brains as a broom clears cobwebs. They knew the fight was lost.

"For'ard with ye!" shouted the skipper. "Down to the foc'sl'e! Drop your knives!"

They fled in a huddle, leaving Badoun gasping his last, Telak on his face, motionless. As they ran they dropped the *kris*es. The skipper herded them, with Pinckney and Evans, fastening the fore-castle hatch above them. Sykes turned to the cuddy door, now opening.

"We'll work the ship to Macassar ourselves," said the skipper. They can stay there. They'll swing for this, the last one of them."

"Short and sweet that was," said the panting Sykes to the women. "Did you see the skipper? A man-tamer, that's what he is. But it was a bit of a close shave, at that."

He flung himself, panting, into a chair, and held out this wrist to the elder woman.

"The bandage shifted," he said. "D'yer mind fixin' it?"

Mary Leigh stepped to the door. Her mind was clearing slowly from the tragedy that had deadened it. She saw Samson, standing over the fallen Telak, and her glance passed on to where the skipper was coming aft again, big, burly, shouldering along on the deck that he had won. A great light shone in her eyes.

Suddenly Samson, who had been watching her, reckoned the blankness of her gaze as it had ignored him, knowing why it had suddenly become brilliant, kicked savagely at Telak. Perhaps the Malay, clinging to revenge in the face of death, had been shamming, waiting his chance with the unquenchable patience of his kind.

His face turned from the planks, one hand shot out like the flung coil of a serpent, it clutched the mate's ankle, dragged him down with a frenzied jerk. In the other hand a *kris* rose and fell once. Then Telak's arms dropped with a thud, his twisting features stilled and grayed. And Samson, blood spouting from below his groin, strove to drag himself away.

The barkentine was headed into the sunset, flowing in sheets of crimson splendor, clouds moving across the deeper glare like smoke. Into the wind she forged while the eastern sky flowed red, and everywhere, save where the dazzle of the sun played,

the sea ran deepest-blue with a hint of glowing foam in the crests.

Mary Leigh was alone with the skipper in the cuddy. Pinckney held the wheel. The course was set for Macassar. Quong had come out of his galley, deprecatory.

"No good for me," he said. "Me cookee, no good for fight. If I no mixee, mebbe they let me alone. Now evelly-thing allee lightee."

Badoun and Telak had gone to the sharks. The mutineers, secured below the hatch, would be delivered over to justice within twenty-four hours. Sykes and Evans acted as the working crew for the diminished sailspread. Samson was in his bunk, with Miss Burton tending him. The skipper had just come from patching him up.

"He is not going to die, unless there is blood-poisoning," said the skipper. "We'll have him in hospital this time to-morrow. This breeze is going to hold."

He did not look at the girl, though he felt her gaze compelling him. He cleared the table of two cutlases, setting them in place in the rack.

"You had better turn in," he said. "It has been a strenuous day. You needn't worry about Samson. He'll get well."

"I'm not bothering about him," she said, and the trembling quality of her voice brought the skipper face to face with her. "He doesn't matter," she went on, and her face was the hue of the afterglow. Her eyes as sparkling as the crystal facets of the waves. "Nothing matters—except *you!*"

The skipper's pent-up passion overflowed as he swept her into his arms, holding her fiercely.

"You mean that?" he asked hoarsely. She answered him with her lips. Presently he felt her relax in his arms with a sigh.

"I'm hurting you," he said. She smiled up at him.

"Do," she said. "I want you to. What is it, John, you wrote in your log, after the day's record?"

He replied wonderingly:

"So ends this day?"

"That's it. So ends this day. And every other day. Like this."

(The end.)

Pride of Tyson

by John Frederick

Author of "Crossroads," "Luck," etc.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SHADOW OF THOUGHT.

IN the mind of Garth's mother thoughts moved as slowly as the tortoise creeps, but they plodded on with equal sureness of gaining their end. Into the train of her thinking burst an interruption that shattered the quiet of the room. It was Margaret Tyson, who whirled in through the door carrying the sunshine with her.

"Edward is up-stairs changing," she announced. "We're going motoring around the dam. Won't you come with us?"

Mrs. Garth adjusted her glasses so that she could look up more easily. It always made her wince to hear the girl call her son Edward; and she had not been with them for ten days! She gathered her sewing more closely in her lap, for when Margaret ran in, in this manner, it affected Mrs. Garth like a disturbing wind.

"I think not," she answered slowly. "No, I guess I won't go."

Margaret dropped to the footstool before her, clasping her lithe hands about her knees.

"Why not?" she asked. "Do you *have* to do that sewing?"

Mrs. Garth blinked, for in the new position a shaft of sunlight set the girl's hair afire. Mrs. Garth often winced like this when Margaret came close, as she would have winced if a chain of great diamonds had been flashed in her eyes.

"I guess I won't go," she announced in the same mild voice.

"Why not?" repeated Margaret Tyson. She laid an impulsive hand on the knee of the elder woman. "You sit here so much,

so many hours every day, that sometimes I feel as if you must be unhappy."

Mrs. Garth dropped her eyes and could not answer for a moment. When she sat by that window in the old days, she had been waiting for the coming of her boy with the night; she had been waiting for him—the goal of every day. But now when he came home there was some one else to welcome him and receive his smile.

She found a swelling coming in her throat at the thought. This day, this Sunday, for instance, she and Eddie would have sat about, talking a little, until the evening came, and then they would have gone for a short stroll down the street in the cool. But now? Surely it was not good for him to go gadding on his one day of rest.

"I'm just restin'," answered Mrs. Garth in her thin, quiet voice.

Margaret Tyson slipped to a position behind the other's chair and leaned her elbows on its back. Her hands were folded just beside Mrs. Garth's face, and the latter watched, from the corner of her eyes, the gleam of them in the sun. Just a ray which played about them. And when Margaret spoke, the rich, full tremor of her voice, tense with good spirits that overflowed, sent an uneasy quiver through Garth's mother. She was like a shadow, she felt bitterly, compared with this brightness of youth. No wonder Eddie was dazzled.

"Look out there through the window!" urged Margaret gently. "Look at the sunshine! Don't you want to get out and fairly bathe in it? Aren't you hungry for it? Come with us and get the wind in your face, Mrs. Garth. I love the wind. Don't you?"

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"It's always blowin' things," answered Mrs. Garth. "And bright sunlight ain't any too good for the eyes, Miss Tyson."

She could not see how Margaret stepped back and looked down, puzzled, at Garth's mother. But Mrs. Garth felt the greater distance, and breathed more easily. Sometimes, when the girl was so close, she felt as if she were fighting away an intoxication. It was like a spiritual danger leaning over her. Besides, really good girls, homemakers, were never so gay and confident as this Margaret Tyson. The latter made one more attempt, after starting to turn away.

"It makes me really unhappy," she said earnestly, "to see you here all day—and most of the night—with that dark shawl around your shoulders, like a sign of mourning."

Mrs. Garth lifted her glance at that, and the mistiness cleared from her eyes a little.

"When you get to my age," she said, "you'll have things to sorrow over."

"Not if I live to be a thousand. Sorrow is a habit. If you would come out—"

"Oh, Margaret!" called the deep voice of Garth.

"I'm in here!" she answered. Then the door opened.

"We're losing the prime of the morning. Let's start before the crispness is out of the air."

"I'm trying to get your mother to come."

"Oh, mother?" Mrs. Garth tensed herself. "Don't worry about her. You can't pry her out of that chair. Come on, Margaret. Good-by, mother."

The door closed on them as Margaret went out, and the current of Mrs. Garth's thoughts started again at the point where they had been broken off. Her son should not marry Margaret Tyson. That was the beginning and end of her ponderings, the period to each idea. Margaret Tyson should not marry Eddie.

It was not that she really disliked the girl, but there was a mortal strangeness about Margaret which was worse than dislike. She felt that if Eddie married her, his mother would forever-after be an outsider in his home. Even now the girl was carrying him away into new fields.

She did not actually think that Margaret loved Garth. That was impossible. She had seen those keen, short side-glances now and again. Sometimes they rested on the furniture and sometimes they rested on the face of Edward—at such moments, for instance, as when he talked of pictures, or music.

Other times, when he spoke of his work, his plans, his future, the girl was an intent, fascinated listener; but every now and then that keen, cold, penetrating glance darted out and transfixed something to the heart. Obviously, she could not love Edward. But sometimes, in this twentieth century, women did not marry for love. It was not like the old days. Margaret might be ambitious.

Yet it puzzled Mrs. Garth more and more as the days went on, seeing the growing intimacy between the two. Margaret was above her son's class, and no good came from mixing classes. Edward himself often said that. He talked of it in Henry Tyson—the difference between that fellow's pride and the pride of ordinary men.

But of course he was blind to the pride of Margaret simply because that pride was covered with feminine softness. And she, for her part, was not blind to the faults of Edward—witness those keen glances many a time. But something seemed to charm the girl.

For one thing, she was continually reverting to what "Hal" said of Garth. In the eyes of her brother, it appeared that Garth was a great builder, an important man. Indeed, it seemed that the whole basis of Margaret's regard for her son was based on what Henry Tyson had told her. On that she built. To that she constantly reverted, and would not let the other jarring notes call her away from the main trend and tenor of the big man's mind. He was a creator. And she talked of him as another girl might have talked of a poet.

All this was strange to Mrs. Garth, but she felt vaguely that Henry Tyson was at the base of the trouble. He was the leverage through which Garth had been raised to such a height in the eyes of Margaret.

They must not marry!

She had tried various ways of opening

the eyes of Margaret. Whenever possible, she talked of the old, poor days. That grated on the girl, she saw. But always Margaret shrugged the unpleasant tales of poverty away, and brought Edward back to thoughts of his great work—the reclaiming of the desert.

They must not marry!

She fastened the idea more securely with every stitch of her needle. She felt a certain confidence in her ability to handle her son. Indeed, she had directed the course of his life in far more ways than he himself was aware.

Her power was the power of the water dropping upon the stone. In the first place it was her gentle, steady, relentless insistence which had forced her boy to go through school. She had starved to provide the funds many times, but she had never let him know that she suffered. In times when he was tempted to give up the long preparation, she had been there to lay a hand on his shoulder.

She kept her faith in God; and in Edward's future. She had a vague feeling that she had gone into partnership with the Father, and that between them they had turned out this masterpiece.

And now, to have that masterpiece taken from her by this girl—no, that could not be. She stitched the certainty more firmly home. They must not marry!

The morning wore on.

What would be Edward's life with Margaret? Already he was changing. It began with the dissatisfaction with the furnishings for which he had paid so much. Then there had been consultations between him and Margaret, and then a rearranging of the rooms. The very room she sat in was now so strange to her that she hardly recognized it. There were not half so many things in it. Also, the girl had strange ideas about harmonizing colors, and Edward had listened as if to a dictator.

He sat like a pupil at the knee of a teacher, and Margaret grew interested in the teaching. Also, there were the evenings when he played the phonograph, and she talked to him about the music. And there were other evenings when she sat at the piano and played for him, and stopped

now and then and talked again, and then played once more.

The education of Edward was beginning over again, and along lines in which Mrs. Garth was a stranger. They must not marry!

What would it be like if Edward were to have to meet the friends of Margaret, friends who must be like that terrible, proud brother of hers, of whom Edward talked so much, with something approaching dread? They must not marry!

A door opened and slammed, so that she started. Then steps; then voices, one deep, and one light and musical, playing over the other like sunshine over water.

They had returned!

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ALLIANCE.

THEY did not come directly to her, but she heard them first about the house, the heavy footfall of Garth sounding here and there, and his booming voice, and then the laughter of Margaret.

She hearkened to that laughter as a bird past its singing days might listen to the whistling of a young songster which makes music for its mate in spring. Eventually they came in to her, Margaret first, and Garth, with a roll of paper under his arm, stood back nearer to the door as if he grudged his mother even this moment of delay. With the precision of sadness she noted it all.

"Back so soon?" she asked quietly.

"You *must* come with us now," burst out Margaret. "We've found the most wonderful place for a house."

Not a muscle stirred in the face of Mrs. Garth. Indeed, she had been schooled in pain; but in her heart there were ashes and dust.

"A house?" she echoed carefully. "Ain't this a good enough house?"

"It's well enough while the dam is building," broke in Garth, irritated, "but of course it won't do afterward. This isn't a permanent home. Will you come along with us, mother?"

No life in his invitation. He hurt her

more than the girl had done, yet she very naturally laid all her sorrow to the credit of Margaret.

"It's up on La Cabeza," ran on Margaret happily. "You know where the side to the east slopes out into a shoulder?"

"Yes."

"That's the place for the house Edward is going to build. We came back for paper, and now he's going to go up there and sketch the outlines for the plan. Perfectly wonderful site. You see, when the dam is finished, and the water backed up the valley, it will be a regular lake. That will be the back view. There's to be a patio, with the house surrounding it in two wings, a sort of hexagon."

She began to draw the idea in with her hands, fixing the plan in the air so that she kept one eye upon it and one eye upon Mrs. Garth. "Imagine the outlook from the center of the patio! One way we'll look down on the desert—"

"It won't be a desert then," put in Garth.

"Of course not. All green, and every inch of it due to your work. That will be in front, looking away down through the front wings of the house. Think of that when the blue comes in the evening and draws across the green things. And then toward the back we'll look down on the lake—miles and miles of water going up the Chiluah. Those sloping hills will make wonderful beaches, Edward."

"I hadn't thought of that. Coming, mother?"

"I guess I'll stay here." She saw his relief, shook her head at Margaret, and a moment later the pair were gone again. It seemed to her as if their voices grew more joyous as soon as they were away from her.

A house! There could be only one meaning in that. She knew that when a girl begins to plan a home with a man she generally, consciously or unconsciously, figures herself in it. So far Margaret was probably going ahead innocently enough. Edward had not asked the important question, that was plain. But while they conned over those plans, while they sat together imagining the furniture, anything might

happen. Mrs. Garth sat bolt upright in her chair, staring, as if a ghost faced her.

Of course it was the impulse of the moment which was sweeping the girl away. She was several thousand miles away from her own home and people. She lost her perspective and judged Edward as he wished to be judged—in his own setting, where he was a king among men. Afterward, in the time of awakening, she would begin to make comparisons, and then life would be hell for them both. If only some of Margaret Tyson's own New York friends were there to keep her in touch with facts—at this point Mrs. Garth actually cried out, a low, hoarse note of exultation. Then she rang the bell beside the chair.

To the mozo who opened the door in answer, she said: "Have you heard of a certain Mr. Henry Tyson here in La Blanca?"

The mozo frowned to collect his thoughts, and then shook his head. Mrs. Garth drew in her breath impatiently. It was stupid that she did not know the man's address, though his sister lived in her house.

"Miss Tyson's brother," she explained eagerly. "A young man with yellow hair like that of Miss Tyson. Ain't you heard of him? Yellow hair, and—"

"El Oro!" cried the mozo, and his eyes and teeth flashed at once. "*Sí, sí, señora!* El Oro! I know him well. I know Rodriguez, and Rodriguez is his friend."

"Go bring him here. Go tell him that I wish to see him at once—please!"

The mozo stared an instant, for he was unused to such precise commands from the little old lady; then he nodded and disappeared. And Mrs. Garth picked up her sewing and the broken trend of her thoughts. They must not marry!

It was not more than a half-hour before the mozo appeared again, breathless, and his eyes shining. He had seen and talked to El Oro, and he had many things to tell his fellows about the strange man.

"El—Señor Tyson is here," he announced. Then he burst out: "Señor El Oro himself, *señora!*"

"Bring him here to me!" commanded Mrs. Garth, and she centered her attention on her stitches. She was perfectly cool and

collected now, just as she had always been perfectly cool and collected on those other times when Edward had been ready to throw up the burden in his early days—those years of starvation before he got his first really big commission.

Then she heard the door open, and a light footfall tapped on the floor. She felt the new presence rather than heard his coming.

"This is Mrs. Garth?" queried a pleasant voice.

When she looked up, she started, the resemblance to Margaret was so great, but her second glance showed her differences.

For instance, his chin ended in an abrupt square instead of the rounded finish, and his cheek-bones were more pronounced, the forehead higher, the cheeks thinner. Moreover, from the eyes of this man, as from Margaret's, there came a fire, but it was a gentle flame in the girl, and in the man it was a consuming thing.

He was such a person as Mrs. Garth could never imagine unpoised, uncontrolled, unsure of himself. He looked straight into her eyes, smiling.

"How are you," she said, and took his hand. He kept her from getting up, and slipped at once into a chair. She saw that his pale hands were reddened on the inside, a sure proof that he had been doing common labor, and his clothes were ingrained with the dust of cement, and shining from ineffectual brushing. Nevertheless, he gave a singular impression of cleanliness.

"We been wishing you 'd come to see us," she began, a little uneasily, "but Eddie says that you won't come to visit; not while you're workin' on the dam."

"I couldn't play the rôle of your son's friend and a common laborer," he answered. "Of course you see that. And I really shouldn't stay here long now. It won't do for the men to think that I have a stand-in with the big boss."

She looked at him narrowly, but there was no double meaning on his face.

"I won't keep you long," she said. "I got a little thing to speak to you about."

"Don't let me hurry you," he answered. She saw his glance wander about the room, first carelessly, then with sudden interest.

"By Jove," he said suddenly, "this is very pleasant."

"The arranging of the room is your sister's work," she answered pointedly.

"Oh?" he queried politely.

"She and Eddie," nodded Mrs. Garth, and watched him shrewdly. But it was plain that the coupling of the two names meant nothing to him.

It was hard for her to break in upon the main thread of her talk, for there was something airy and easy about this fellow which embarrassed her.

"It's about your sister and Eddie that I want to talk to you," she said.

And she folded her hands over the sewing and looked him in the eye. He had started to nod casually, but now he sat up a little straighter and stared.

"Yes?" he said, rather breathlessly.

"I'd like to know if your sister has been talkin' to you any about my son?"

"About Garth?" He kept his intense eyes upon her. "I've seen very little of Margaret since she came, and when we talked—yes, she has often spoken of him. Quite enthusiastically. Why do you ask?"

"Because Eddie has been talkin' a lot about her."

There was no doubt of her meaning by this time. She saw a sharp flush dye the cheek of Tyson, and his jaw set.

"Mr. Tyson," she said, throwing diplomacy to the winds, "I ain't in favor of it. Are you?"

He could not speak.

"They ain't the same kind of folks," she went on, scoring her points rapidly, "and they 'd regret it later on."

She saw his throat-muscles bulge, and then he controlled himself with an effort that left his hands clenched and his face colorless.

"They're not the same—" he echoed, and then, half under his breath: "Good God, Mrs. Garth, what do you mean?"

"Just what I'm saying. Seeing a lot of each other is pretty dangerous for young folks, and Eddie and your sister have been seeing a pile of each other lately. I been watching."

"Do you mean to say that your son—Garth—is dreaming of —"

It angered her to see his incredulous unbelief, his scorn.

"But don't worry," he muttered, settling back in his chair. "I'm sorry that he's drawn false impressions. Margaret is always a little too friendly, and people are apt to put wrong constructions upon it. I'll speak to her. Very sorry this has happened."

"They been planning a house," she said non-committally, and she could have laughed in spite of her pain to see him writhe.

"A house?" he said heavily. "Margaret has been planning a house with your son?"

He rose from his chair—jumped up almost—and began walking back and forth with a quick, light step. She could see that he was enraged; she saw more than that; that he was containing his wrath by a great effort.

"How long has this been going on, Mrs. Garth?"

He turned as he spoke, and the words went snapping at her.

She took up her sewing again and began to work, and every stitch was riveting her original idea: they should not marry! She had won the great first step; Tyson would help her.

"It's been goin' on ever since Eddie saw Margaret."

"Ever since—" He sat down suddenly, staring. "You mean," he added, lowering his voice to a murmur that went thrilling through her, "you mean that it began when he first visited us in New York?"

"It begun when he saw her," said the remorseless old woman. "He made up his mind that she was to be his wife. And what he wants he most generally gets."

"His wife; Margaret his wife," repeated Tyson. "God!"

The idea crushed him first, and then maddened him.

"The only reason he brought you out West—" she began.

"He didn't *bring* me," cut in Tyson coldly. "I came of my own accord."

"The only reason he brought you out here," she insisted, "was because he knew that he wouldn't have no chance with Margaret if he stayed with her in New York.

He knew that he had to get her out in his own country—where manners and things like that don't count so much. So he brung you because he knew that she'd come trailin' after."

And she heard him breathing quick and hard.

"A double purpose?" said Tyson.

There was a long pause. She became afraid to look into his face, yet there were few things which Mrs. Garth feared.

"All that talk about hardening me up, giving me a taste of the real iron of life—" he stopped. "I thank you for letting me know this, Mrs. Garth."

"And now what are you going to do?"

He stood with the knuckles of both hands grinding into his forehead. When he looked at Mrs. Garth again, his eyes were blank, like the eyes of a child which cannot understand some difficult explanation. "Garth brought me here—me—because he wanted to—" Tyson broke off with a strong shudder.

"It is—wrong!" he said, with white lips. And it was as if he had named a leprous thing. "It shall be—prevented."

Mrs. Garth looked narrowly at him. She remembered the massive shoulders of her son, and she remembered what Garth had also told her of their boxing. There were unknown reservoirs of strength in this fellow. What she perceived of him was a very dim hint of the mind within, and yet there was just a touch of fear, even in her cool mind; and there was deep rage also, for she felt the clashing of classes in this conflict between Tyson and her son.

Even in the silence she felt that the crisis was there. The battle was commenced. She saw Tyson staring blankly into vacancy, his face white; and she knew that he was inwardly writhing with pain, shame, hate.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PRIDE LIFTS ITS HEAD.

WHEN, later in the afternoon, she heard the sound of the closing front door, and then the voices, she smiled grimly to herself. They came expecting

to find a lamb, and instead they would walk in on a tiger. And she looked up at Tyson with something akin to affection. He would fight her battle.

Garth was calling as he came: "Mother! Oh, mother!"

The door flew open, and he stood with a lighted face, the gleam was in his eyes, the smile of triumph on his lips.

"Mother," he said again, "I've—"

And then he saw Tyson, and his voice stopped.

"Well," he said, his color rising, "this is a surprise. How are you?"

He began to approach, but the voice of Tyson in his greeting checked the big man at a distance like a stretched out, invisible hand.

"I've come to see Margaret," he said quietly. "Do you know if she's in?"

The embarrassment of Garth was increasing, and the heart of his mother went cold. She knew that the battle had indeed commenced, and the first part had gone against her. As plainly as if he had spoken it in words, she knew that her son had come to tell her that he had asked Margaret Tyson to marry him, and had been accepted.

"Yes, she's in her room, I believe. By the way"—he checked himself again—"I'll show you up, if you wish."

"No," said Mrs. Garth, rising, "I'll take him up."

"Then I'll be waiting for you down here, mother. See you later, Tyson."

And Mrs. Garth led her champion out of the room. Once the door closed behind them, shutting out Garth, she reached for the younger man with a fumbling hand, found his arm, and clung to it. Her dizziness lasted only a moment.

"It's happened," she said. "I seen it in Eddie's face. Mr. Tyson, what're we going to do?"

"I think I shall find something," he said.

They started up the stairway, and even in her agony of pain and suspense she noted the graceful ease with which he helped her, his hand under her elbow. And she felt the steely, flexible strength of his arm, and when he spoke there was quiet ring to his voice.

She compared him with her boy as one compares a rapier of tempered, priceless steel with a battle-ax of ponderous metal with a chopping edge. A different sort of force, but one fully as deadly, she felt.

If she had warned this man in time—but it was useless to talk of "ifs." She clasped his hand in both of hers when they stood just outside Margaret's door.

"God teach you what to say and do," she prayed in a fervent whisper.

And he answered in an ordinary speaking voice: "Thank you very much."

She watched with hungry, yearning eyes as he rapped at the door and then disappeared within the room.

He found Margaret in the very act of throwing off her linen duster, and she turned to him with flushed cheeks.

"Hal!" she cried. "Hal, dear, you couldn't have come at a better time."

He stood by the door, making no move to greet her.

"I don't believe that I could," he said.

They studied each other, she with the smile dying on her face, and he with a smile growing, an unpleasant smile to see. Then he went and sat easily on the foot of the bed, very close to her, and swinging one foot. He might have come to gossip about the weather, to watch him.

"Now what's all this nonsense about?" he said directly.

She stopped with one glove worked half off her hand, and the color of her cheeks became a flare of fire.

"Edward told me he wouldn't tell you till I had had a chance—Hal, you don't mean you disapprove?"

It was as if she had struck him across the face with a whip. He became a sickly sight.

"It's true then, Margaret? You've promised to marry that—" He stopped.

"Don't look at me as if I were a leper," she answered hotly. Then, bewildered: "In Heaven's name, what's wrong with you? Isn't Edward the man you praised as if he were a sort of demigod, a new Titian, a builder, an empire-maker? I forget all the wild terms you used!"

"One praises a strong horse for much the same reasons."

"So that's it! Because his finger-nails aren't manicured? Because he can't take a quip, or make one? Because he has no parlor tricks?"

He stood up straight, and caught both her hands firmly at the wrists.

"Pull yourself together," he said, and though his voice was low it had that quality of metal in it which Mrs. Garth had noted. He changed it subtly to a note of appeal and horror: "For God's sake, Margaret, remember what you are, and what he is!"

She was fully as straight as Tyson, and her glance clashed on his without flinching.

"And what am I? Part of the flotsam of the world; part of the worthless driftwood. And he—"

"Is a superior bricklayer; a very competent ditch-digger."

It was odd to see how nearly alike they became in their anger. His nostrils quivered, and her jaw set in a line almost as stern as that of her brother.

"Hal, I warn you not to talk like this. It's both foolish and useless."

"I had rather be foolish than shamed."

"Ashamed of Edward Garth? Ten days ago your voice shook with pride when you merely mentioned what he was and what he had done. I tell you, I've never had the echo of what you said out of my ears."

"I did. God knows I was a fool; but it's not too late to undo the foolishness."

She started to speak, but he rushed on in the emphatic whisper of the desperate: "Think, think, think! Margaret; he's all big hands and burly arms and scientific mind."

"With the soul of a poet!"

Tyson released her, and groaned.

"He—poet; dear God, this is my own work coming back on me like a boomerang. That heavy-footed dullard the soul of a poet? Margaret, I'll tell you what he has done—this honorable man, who—"

"You don't need to tell me why he brought you out here. He told me about that."

"And you approve of it?"

She flushed, but her anger kept her keyed.

"It was a trick at your expense, but—he loved me, and that would justify a great

deal. Oh, Hal, he was desperate; he told me everything to-day."

He was shaking with passion, but he began to smile.

"Very well," he said. "If that's your view-point, the only way to make you see the truth is to remove the thing that lies in the way."

He started back toward the door, but she intercepted him.

"What do you mean?" she panted. "Hal, remember yourself. You look like a demon. I know what's in your mind."

"Please take your hand away. I'm going to smash him, my dear, as any man would smash an unclean creeping thing that crawled into the heart of his family. I don't know how I'm going to do it, but I'm going to destroy this hulk, this double-dealing, crooked, brazen-faced cur."

She stood away from him at that, saying coldly: "You've spoken quite enough."

"Not yet," he went on in the same deadly manner. "I came out here and learned to look up to this fellow as the soul of honor—a diamond in the rough. I've gone through hell trying to conform to his standards and learn his ways of living. And now I find that I've been using a thieving trickster as my model. I don't know yet what leverage I'll find, but I'm going to ruin this strong man, this giant."

She tore open the door.

"Then go down and tell him that to his face!"

He bowed to her formally.

"I hope you will always retain the instincts of a lady, Margaret."

And he disappeared into the hall.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SPOILS OF VICTORY.

AT the entrance to the living-room he stood quietly, and found Mrs. Garth sitting sewing, while Garth, with a downward head, paced up and down the room anxiously. At the sight of the new-comer, he wheeled toward the door and started forward.

"My mother has been telling me of an unfortunate conversation she's had with

you, Tyson, and I want—" The pale face before him, and the ironical smile, stopped him. "What's the matter?" He began walking forward again. "Listen to me, Tyson—"

"Stay where you are," warned Tyson. "I find it difficult already to breathe this air. It seems to be tainted, Mr. Garth."

A sharp fear turned the big man gray.

"You've seen Margaret, and she has changed her mind?"

"You need have no fear about her just yet," answered the other. "She's still worshipping an idol I helped set up for her. Before long she'll see the clay knees and scrape off the rest of the gilt."

"You can't anger me, Tyson. I know that I have done you a rather shabby turn in bringing you out here with a double purpose. But I've confessed everything to Margaret, and she's absolved me. Don't you see, Tyson, that in my peculiar position I had to resort to unusual means?"

Mrs. Garth made no further pretense of sewing. Her eyes flicked from face to face; hope and despair.

"I think," said Tyson evenly, "that I understand you perfectly."

"Don't talk like that, man! Forget broken bones. I'll spend my life trying to make it up to you, if that's any good. Good God, Tyson, every man in the world has metal in him that will tarnish—and may be burnished again."

"Except gold," answered the other.

"Tyson, don't tempt me too far!"

"Tempt *you*? You cur!"

"You've said something that requires retraction."

"To a man of honor retractions cannot remove stains."

"Tyson, I'm in my own house."

Mrs. Garth was pale as a lichen, but she did not flinch. She raised her head like an ancient war-horse who hears the trumpet.

And her giant son went on, grinding his teeth to keep himself in hand: "Call up an old saying, Tyson: all's fair in love. I had to do what I did. And I'll prove that I'm right by making Margaret happy the rest of her life."

"I suppose you're right," said Tyson calmly. "All's fair in love—and in war.

I came out here and kept my head in the clouds for a while, but now I'll get it back to the earth with a vengeance. Garth, you used me as a leverage to pry your way into my sister's heart. Now, by fair means or by foul, I'm going to smash you—smash you!"

"You have a free hand," said Garth. He balanced himself with his feet spread far apart. "Smash me?" He laughed harshly. "Tyson, unless you're a fool, you'll see what I am out here, and see yourself in comparison. Look there! Can you undo that?"

And he pointed through the window at the looming dam.

"Who knows?" murmured Tyson. "Who knows, Garth? I've seen stranger things done. I suppose I look like a pigmy, Garth, in your eyes, but give me a few days to try myself out."

"As much as you want," sneered Garth. "Tyson, before you go too far, I offer you my hand. I'll forget the things you've said. And I'll spend my life trying to make Margaret happy, and be a member of your family you'll be proud of. Tyson, I swear it on my honor."

"Your honor?"

"Damn you! I tell you frankly, Tyson, I've never liked you very well. There's always been a distance between us."

"Thank God for that!"

"There's always been this devil in you that shows now. And now I say: no matter how I've won Margaret, I'm going to keep her. If I've used a trick, I'll cover that trick with honest gold. Anyway, she's mine. I've fought for her, heart and soul, and to the victor belongs the spoils."

It was a moment before Tyson could answer. He was shuddering like a branch in a windstorm, and his face was terrible.

"A very good maxim, Garth. To the victor belongs the spoils, and the battle is not over."

He raised a forefinger and pointed his words: "Mark me, now. The contract between us is broken. From now on I'm existing simply to smash you, Garth. Watch yourself! Once a crook always a crook. And I intend to show Margaret an intimate view of your heart."

He turned on his heel and strode from the house. The Mexican mozo in the outer hall saw him pass, and at the sight of his face the little servant shrank away and crossed himself.

"The devil is loosed!" he muttered in Spanish, and started as the door clicked softly shut behind the departing figure.

The stronger the purpose which guides a man the greater is the strength he feels within him, and as Tyson went down the street he looked toward the towering mass of the dam. The street he walked had been paved for the workers upon that dam. The houses he passed were occupied by the builders. Yet in spite of the myriads who had labored on it, the dam seemed too vast a work for human hands. Nevertheless, the task before him was the ruin of the man whose brain had conceived the labor, and whose will had executed it.

A thought that would have bowed the heads of most men, but Tyson walked with an upright, springy tread. For one thing, all methods were open to him, good and evil, and when a man admits any possible means of attaining a given end, his resources are infinitely increased.

Full of these thoughts, he saw little about him until he turned aside and leaped up the steps in front of Mrs. Casey's boarding-house. At the head he checked himself with an exclamation, for he had almost collided with a brilliant figure in blues and reds—Rona Carnahan. She, too, started back, but at once she controlled herself.

"Rona!" he exclaimed. "By the Lord, I've been eager to see you. Stand over here. Let me look at you!"

"Why," she said suddenly, the topic uppermost in her mind coming out, childlike, "why do people smile when they look at me—white people, I mean?"

"I never smile."

"You did at first."

"Then I was a fool, and the others who smile now are blockheads. I'll crack their scones for 'em if I ever see 'em doing it, I promise you that. Rona, give me your hand again. I haven't realized how I've missed you."

And he spoke the truth.

"Then why have you stayed away?"

He thought of his last talk to her and his farewell; and he thought of the good old padre; but last of all the words of Garth rang through his mind: "All's fair in love—to the victor belong the spoils." And was he not committed to any course, good or evil?

"I said good-by, but I've changed my mind about that." He brushed the past away with a wide gesture, and then smiled on her. "I'd like to begin again if I may. Did you really come all the way down here to see me?"

There had been just the glint of a coming smile in her eyes, but she threw a curtain over them now.

"No."

"No? Then why? Ah, it was Kennedy!"

"Bah!"

She tossed the thought of Kennedy away with both hands.

"Then why are you here?"

"To find out if you were sick—you've been away so long."

"You knew all the time that I would come back?"

"Of course."

He chuckled, watching her with new eyes of observancy.

"You seem thinner, Rona. Have you been ill?"

"No, I have been sad."

Every man has a taint of the cad at heart—unless he is a saint.

"Sad?" queried Tyson eagerly.

"Because the dam is nearly finished."

She turned and shook her fist at the corner of it which was visible around the edge of the house.

"When it is finished the water will rise in the valley. And San Vicente will be drowned. Poor San Vicente! Tell me, *señor*, is it not a crime against the dear saint to cover his house with water? How can men do such a work?"

When the ground is plowed, any seed will grow in it. Tyson caught a deep breath.

"How can men work at it?" he echoed thoughtfully. "The Mexicans—I won-

der!" He continued solemnly: "For my part, I shall never raise my hand again to help at the work. I repeat."

"It is well, *señor*," said the girl sadly. "But that will not save the grave of my mother. It will be covered with water. I shall never be able to talk to her again!"

"Rona, you would be glad if the dam were stopped—if the water never rose? If all that work went for nothing?"

"If a man could stop that," she cried eagerly, "I'd fall on my knees. I would worship him, I—" She made a little sign of despair. "But it is as easy to move La Blanca as to destroy the dam. Only an angel could do it. Ah, Señor Tyson, why does not the good San Vicente rise against it?" She sighed. "It is late. I must go back."

"Come along then. I'll walk with you."

She started to smile, and then shook her head.

"No," she said, "the padre does not wish me to walk with you in the valley."

"But you are here?"

Her eyes flashed.

"He did not speak of the city."

"Will you come again, Rona?" The devil which dwelt in the new mind of Tyson made his heart leap and then set a thought in his mind. "Listen. To-morrow I am going to move to another place. I have been living in this hovel as a jest—a novelty, you understand? To-morrow I am going to get new rooms. Will you come to see me there, Rona?"

"How should I find you?"

"I shall leave directions at this place. You can inquire. Or I shall come and take you."

"No, no. The padre—"

"Hang the padre! Rona, will you come?"

She looked at him with her head canted to one side, wistfully.

"Will your new house be very beautiful? Flowers in jars, and silken curtains, *señor*?"

"That and more."

She shook her head with sudden decision.

"No, *señor*."

"Why not?"

"I cannot tell, except that I shall not be there."

"Listen to me—"

But she brushed past him and raced down the steps. He felt that it was useless to follow, and turned with a muffled oath back toward the door. For that reason he did not see that she paused, not far away down the street, and looked back.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE THIRD CHIME.

AS for Tyson, he went slowly up the stairs inside toward his room. He went slowly, and for every step he had a thought. It had all happened very strangely and swiftly. That morning he had wakened perfectly happy and contented. He had stepped down into the world of labor, and at last he had won a place for himself in that world. He had accepted a new model of manhood, with a youth's passion for a hero, and Garth filled the pattern of that new model.

Now, in the evening, not a vestige of his old ideas remained. Garth, the idol, lay shattered and broken—to him, and his purpose in life was to crush the big man—break him to helplessness. One great lesson, indeed, he had caught; might is right, and to the victor belong the spoils.

He embraced the idea with a savage joy. To stop that rise of water in the dam it meant the smashing of Garth, the opening of Margaret's eyes, the winning of the wild, lovely girl, Rona.

The door of his room stood ajar, though he generally closed it. He paused there and called: "Well?"

In reply, there was a slight click, and he saw the tall form of Kennedy standing under the light with his arm still raised above his head. Tyson closed the door behind him. Then Kennedy spoke, briefly, like a man who has come on a business errand.

"Have you a gun?"

"No."

"Then I've two," said Kennedy, "and you can take your pick." He produced them with a quick gesture, and laid them

on the table—ponderous forty-five's of amazing length.

"So you've come to shoot me up, Kennedy?"

"I've come to shoot you down," said the big gambler calmly, "as I would any other thief and rustler."

His eyes, fastened at the throat of Tyson, where lay the yellow and black necktie. Tyson understood, for he drew it forth, full length, and smiled.

"Ah," he said, "you've seen Rona, and she's given you a bit of her tongue. When I saw her last she was a bit surprised that you hadn't fought for the sake of the necktie. But it's too late now, Kennedy. She's made up her mind about you."

"You're a bold man, partner," said the Westerner, and he caressed the gun nearest to him. "And you've played a strong game. You've done well with your hand, but now it's called. That's all."

He chuckled deep in his throat, and his eyes probed the body of Tyson as though picking the places where his bullets should strike.

"You're a good man, Tyson, but at this game I think that I'm a bit better."

"It's very clear," Tyson nodded. "You apparently think that the only passport you need back to her favor is the necktie?"

"You got the Bible beat for thinking," agreed Kennedy.

But Tyson was fallen into a muse. There are times when discretion is the better part of valor, and he thought now of the uncanny ease with which Kennedy had produced the two big guns. The man was an expert in their use, he knew, while for his part he had never fired twenty shots with firearms of any description.

Moreover, there were reasons why it would be most inconvenient to be put even temporarily out of commission; for now was the time to raise a tide to sweep up against Garth; his voice was needed to give it direction. It was a hard thing to do—harder than almost anything he had done in his life.

"It's a strange thing," he said, "if we should fall out about a piece of colored silk. I've had my fun out of it, Kennedy, and now you might as well have yours."

He raised his hand to undo the tie, while Kennedy stood frowning in astonishment, with a palpable sneer lifting the corners of his mouth. Yet the slender fingers of Tyson never tugged loose the knot of the tie; they stopped as they touched it, for he saw, again, the picture of the face, dim as the obliterated features of a sphinx, that had appeared at the crest of La Cabeza.

The old legend said: love within a year after that vision, or death. And here was death looking at him out of the keen eyes of Kennedy. To struggle now was like gambling against fate, and Tyson loved above all else the gambling chance. His hands fell from his throat, and he smiled upon Kennedy.

"I had forgotten," he said, "that there's another score between us that makes it impossible for me to give you the tie. I'm sorry for it. It's a little thing, but I can still feel the tingle where your fingers struck my face the other day. For that reason, Kennedy, I'll have to accept your offer of a gun."

He rose, and as he did so, by chance, a bell from the church in the town began to toll, slowly, with whole seconds between the beats.

"A knell for you, Kennedy," smiled Tyson. He continued: "Unfortunately, I don't know a thing about guns. So when we fight we'll have to leave the result to chance. Let me have the guns—so! Now stand back a pace from the table, as I do. Good! You see, Kennedy, there lies a gun with the muzzle toward you. There lies a gun at my end of the table with the muzzle toward me. The thing we each must do is to reach our gun at a signal, get it by the trigger end, and then blaze away. That makes our chances equal."

Kennedy forced a laugh.

"It's a good joke," he said. "The next time I have a drink I'll laugh over it."

"I'm as serious as a minister."

"Fire across this table?" cried Kennedy.

"Not so loud," warned Tyson. "Why not across the table?"

"Murder, plain murder!"

"But we've equal chances."

"A man couldn't fail to hit at a single yard."

"Exactly. It all depends, you see, not on marksmanship, but on ability to get to the gun first. It makes up, you understand, for my poor marksmanship, and we start even."

Kennedy changed color.

"But here?" he queried. "In this house?"

"To the dead man," said Tyson calmly. "It will make no difference what happens after the shots are fired. And for my part, I'm willing to take a chance on what will follow."

Kennedy stared.

"If you begin to feel shaky about it," suggested Tyson.

But the other broke in hotly: "Make it any way you will. I'm not the kind that bluffs out. You can tie our left hands together, if you want, and be damned to you!"

"Of course," nodded Tyson, "that would be surer still; but I want to give you some chance. Listen to the bell of the church. We'll count by that. The next stroke is our first count, and at the third stroke we go for the guns. Hear!"

The clapper of the bell sent out the next dull, wavering vibration. They faced each other; the eyes of Tyson were glued to the face of his opponent; the eyes of Kennedy were lowered to his gun. And so the seconds passed, till the second stroke of the bell.

At the sound Kennedy started, body and eye, lurching for his gun. But he recovered himself in time, and stepped back in place. The move, however, had betrayed his hair-trigger nervousness, and like a gambler who has betrayed his hand to a foe, Kennedy flashed up a sullenly defiant glance at Tyson.

With his gaze once fastened on the smaller man, he could not again change its direction, for Tyson held him, as it were, with the superior strength of self-confidence. He had not started at that second stroke of the bell. Hand and foot and eye had remained true to him, and the admission of weakness showed in a sudden pallor that swept over the taut features of Kennedy.

In contrast his eyes grew large and very

dark, and his forehead gleamed with perspiration. More than all, there was a visible quivering of his arms—the gun would wobble crazily in that hand even when he had seized the butt.

They waited for the third stroke of the bell, while the humming of the last fell and died slowly away to a sound thinner than the strain of a muted violin. But the third stroke never came. Tyson raised a forefinger.

"Luck is with you, Kennedy," he said, and smiled.

The blood rushed back into the face of the gambler. He leaned over and scooped up his weapons.

"Another time!" he muttered, and strode from the room.

From the hall Tyson caught the sounds of muffled, rapidly lessening curses, and then he sank into his chair, and a not unpleasant sense of weakness slipped through his limbs he knew perfectly that Kennedy would never have the courage to face him again.

A new sound roused him from his thoughts. It was a faint tapping, and the sound seemed to come from above him. It stopped, then it began again in a sudden, rattling volley. Rain!

He ran like a panic-stricken fugitive at the cry of fire, and looked out the window. That was the meaning of the sudden darkness in the early evening. He had been too wrapped up in his thoughts to look, but now he saw that the sky was sheeted in dull gray, here a furling reef, and there solid sheets. Rain!

And the waters would soon be rising behind the dam. There was no time to be wasted.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A WORD IN TIME.

OUTSIDE, he found that every one was pouring out into the streets to watch for the starting of the down-pour. For when the rain commenced in the valley of the Chihuahua it was no light thing. The skies emptied themselves in a gush. So far there were nothing but min-

ate guns which announced the approach of the storm, and far-off thunder growled in the hills. La Cabeza had put on a sullen hood of vapor.

Little water had fallen, but enough to spot the streets and send up a sharp alkali scent. It was almost as if the dead earth were crying aloud for drink! But Tyson noted these details with an anxious eye, and then pushed straight for the quarter of the town where Rodriguez lived. When he reached the street he commenced walking with downward head, as one who broods over a great sorrow.

As he had expected, Rodriguez sat in his doorway with his guitar across his knees. He rose with a gay shout at the sight of Tyson.

"Señor El Oro!" he called, and then, after he had shaken hands: "What is wrong? Where is your sunshine gone? Why are you so changed, *señor*?"

"I—" began Tyson; then hastily: "I must not speak!"

"So?" and the heavy eyebrows of Rodriguez lifted.

"But I must be on," murmured Tyson, and turned away.

"*Señor!*" cried Rodriguez. "*Señor El Oro!* What is your sorrow?"

Tyson turned slowly back.

"I grieve," he said sadly, "that so many men should be damned for a sin of which they do not know."

Rodriguez caught his breath.

"What men—damned?"

"You—I—all of us who work here!"

The Mexican crossed himself; his eyes were starting from his head. "*Señor!*" he gasped.

"Adios, Rodriguez."

"But the sin? What sin, *señor*?"

"If I should speak it might cause great trouble. I cannot speak."

"The sin, the sin! Ah, Señor El Oro, open my eyes to my wrong, and I shall go to the good father—"

"Rodriguez," answered Tyson sternly, as one who sees a divine thing tampered with, "can you undo with prayer daily a sin which you daily work at with your hands?"

"Merciful Virgin!" breathed the big

man, and drew a noisy breath through his expanded nostrils.

"But I have talked too much," muttered Tyson. "Once more, *adios, señor!*"

But Rodriguez was before him, blocking the way.

"You are my friend, *señor*," he pleaded. "I have seen it many times in your eyes that you are the friend of poor Rodriguez! Tell me all!"

"I tell you," cried Tyson impatiently, "if I should say what I know it might work a great harm. Yet," he mused, "you are a good man, Rodriguez. I am sorry for you."

"I have five children. What would come of them?"

"I truly grieve for you, poor Rodriguez!"

"In pity, *señor!*"

Tyson bowed his head in a long silence in which he seemed to be struggling with himself.

"Then to you, only, Rodriguez, for it tears my heart to think of your damnation. It is the thought of your five children that moves me, my friend."

"The saints will save thee," said the Mexican, in a voice that trembled with solemn emotion. "Speak, and I shall not breathe a word of it to a man, a woman, or a child."

"Saving your own?"

"My own. Yes, yes; saving my own *señor*."

Tyson drew close. There was a strong scent of strange liquors and of onions on the breath of Rodriguez, but Tyson controlled his shudder and approached his lips to the very ear of the big foreman.

"Up the valley of the Chiluah," he whispered, "there is a holy place."

"San Vicente!" muttered Rodriguez hoarsely.

"And the dam," continued Tyson hurriedly, "will back the waters high up the valley—will cover San Vicente to the bell-tower. The work of God will be destroyed by the work of man—and on the soul of every worker on the dam there will rest a weight heavier than lead, dragging his eternal spirit down—down—to the fires of hell—to burn forever!"

Rodriguez reeled back and caught at the lintel of his door for support.

"God be with us!" he stammered.

Tyson bowed his head. "We are lost," he said heavily.

"But the father—Padre Miguel—why has he not warned us?"

"The padre is an old man."

"True, true!"

"And old men think little."

"Señor El Oro, that is also true. My old grandfather—but we—what shall we do?"

"What can we do?"

The Mexican groaned. "Ave Maria—"

"What will prayers signify in the ear of the Lord," warned Tyson solemnly, "when the sight of the dam is ever in his eyes? Do you think that he will forget the sin of the least of us who have worked upon it?"

"My wife—my children—"

"Ah, Rodriguez, my heart is heavier for you than for myself."

"I shall not lift another sack of cement!"

"It is well, Rodriguez. It may save you still. Repentance is great in the books of Heaven! Neither shall I labor."

"But my friends—my so many friends—shall I leave them to blunder blindly to hell?"

"Remember, poor Rodriguez, that you have promised. Yet I shall release you so far as this: Those who are dear to you you may warn. All others—"

"The saints have sent you to warn us. I knew—did not I tell Bianca—that you were no common man. The hand of the Lord has put a sign upon your head. Ah, *señor*, upon my death-bed, I shall remember."

"And what work you have done upon the dam, pray that it may be forgiven you, Rodriguez."

"This night—"

"It is well. Adios again, Rodriguez. I feel that there is still hope for us if we can but change our ways."

But Rodriguez gathered him in a mighty embrace against a sweaty bosom, and then rushed into his house, and the sound of his loud voice rattling forth the terrible tid-

ings to his wife followed Tyson down the street.

When he had gone a little distance he turned at a plaza and looked back upon the town. The shadow of the great dam rose over it, and Tyson began to laugh, softly, to himself. He was hailed in the midst of his laughter and saw before him the little Mexican for whom he had gambled at Kennedy's place.

"You are gay, Señor El Oro?" asked the other, and he grinned in sympathy. "Yes, it is good to watch the rain!"

"Gay?" frowned Tyson. "I was laughing, my poor friend, to think what fools we have been. Look back at the dam! It casts a shadow over us; it blots out half of Heaven, and in the end it shall blot out our hopes of eternal happiness."

"Ha?"

"I shall tell you," said Tyson. "Walk on with me."

And as they went down the street he began to talk rapidly. Before his tale was five minutes old, the little man was quaking; at the end of six, he was a pale-faced, nervous wreck.

"San Vicente reward you for warning me," he stammered. "Señor El Oro, twice you have save me. You shower your favors like the water from the sky. Only one thing I beg. Let me speak with my poor friend, Pedro Juachez. Let me give him the word."

"To him only, then. *Adios, señor.*"

The other waved a hasty hand and fled at the full speed of his withered legs. And Tyson grinned after him. The devil was up. In two hours, he knew, every peon in La Blanca would have the tale in his ears, magnified a thousandfold by repetition. Let Garth save himself if he could. He would need all his power now.

In the mean time, he would live no longer like a pig in the squalid sty of Mrs. Irene Casey. Before the stores of the town closed, Tyson visited two shops. One was a Mexican renting office; the other was a furniture shop which, from the need of providing both well-to-do whites and the Mexicans, contained a really wide variety of stuffs. In this place, Tyson spent most of the evening.

And he took occasion to put certain secrets in the ears of the proprietors.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE CRISIS.

MURMURS of the gathering storm passed through the heavens that night, and murmurs of another nature passed among the peons of La Blanca. Overhead, the thunder rolled and chattered, and now and again long lightnings leaped across the sky, splitting it like an ax into two jagged sections. In the Mexican quarter of La Blanca, underneath, human voices continued until dawn.

Here and there groups gathered on doorsteps. Now and again there was some house bursting with illumination where hidden hoards of tequila had been brought to the light, and pulque, mysteriously produced from nowhere in particular, washed down the more fiery liquor as chasers.

And always the talk went fast and quickly about the board. The name of El Oro was often on the tongue; and likewise they named Garth, the big boss. For him, they made their teeth glint like suddenly bared knives. So the morning came.

At dawn the sky was thick and heavy, and occasional gusts of rain had drenched the houses and sprinkled the dusty streets of La Blanca; yet it was not to the sky above them that the inhabitants turned their eyes.

They stared to the north, for the tops of the mountains were obscured by a mist, low-hanging, streaked with deepest black, that moved continually nearer. And all men knew that the rain was descending in sudden torrents through the upper valley of the Chiluah.

Be it understood that rain fell seldom even in the mountains, but when it did come there it rushed down like a cloud-burst; and the older inhabitants gathered here and there to tell of storms of the past, and how they had seen walls of water plunging down a valley—a sheer rise of three to eight feet sweeping along with a sound like thunder and gutting away the banks on either side.

In a raincoat Margaret Tyson hurried through the first scattering drops of the downpour. She was going to the office of Garth, from which she could watch when the first strong torrent of water struck the dam and backed up. However, the rain did not follow her all the way to the office; it turned into a thin mist whose falling was barely perceptible; but far up the valley the clouds gathered more and more thickly and the long lightnings lunged close to the horizon, flickerings of light.

When she reached the little office building Garth was not there. His secretary brought her in and seated her; Garth had gone to the dam, said the secretary, and might be back at once—urgent business had kept him from filling his engagement to meet her at his office at this hour. And having said this, the secretary fairly turned his back upon her and stood at the window.

"Look!" said Margaret suddenly to him. "There's some trouble out there!"

The entire vicinity of the dam was black with men, but along the surface of the works there was not a crane in motion, and hardly a column of smoke arose from the donkey engines. Those men, who were darkening all the slope, stood idle, or mixing blindly, one group with another. Not a hand was lifted in useful work.

"Perhaps they're waiting, like us, for the coming of the water," suggested Margaret.

The secretary cried out beneath his breath, stood for another instant transfixed at the window, and then rushed to the door. As he threw it open they heard the deep voice of Garth saying: "Stand off! I'm not a dead man yet, as they'll learn before I'm done with 'em."

And Garth himself stood at the door. Blood streaked one side of his face, which was set and grim. He strode across the room without the slightest heed of the two men and seated himself at his desk. A cloud of other men appeared at the door.

"Delaney!" bellowed Garth, and an old Irishman stepped in. His eyes were fixed upon Garth as upon a miracle. "Do you know the man who fired that shot?"

"Ay, sir. Rodriguez."

"The foreman in the cement-house? I thought I recognized his black face."

"Here's the marshal, sir," broke in Delaney. "Shall I have him swear in a posse?"

"To fight that army of fools? No!"

The marshal broke through the group at the door as Garth spoke. He was one of those low, broadly built men who seem designed for battle—like bulldogs.

"Got your message, Garth," he said as he entered, "and came right up. Give me the straight of it and I'll have these greasers in order in jig-time." Here he caught sight of the bloody face of Garth, who kept his handkerchief pressed against the wound. "By God, they nicked you!"

"It's nothing," answered Garth. "The point is—"

"Wait one moment," said Margaret quietly. "I can take care of it." And she stood beside him. The marshal jerked off his hat and stared stupidly; it was no place for a woman. But Garth flushed almost as deeply as the blood upon his face.

"You!" he said huskily. "I forgot—"

But Margaret had already turned away and was taking a small first-aid cabinet from the hands of the secretary, who was palsied with excitement. She opened it, and set to work quickly, washing the shallow scalp-wound and dressing it in haste and with precision; but even while she worked the marshal was asking questions.

"Open up," he said. "The quicker the better, because I'll need to swear in a posse. Just what happened?"

"The water from the mountains is due on the rush," said Garth. "An hour—two hours—three hours—I don't know how long. It all depends on how hard and how steadily it rains in the upper valley."

"That's plain."

"I've got to catch that water, Marshal Vance! When it comes it will come like an ocean tide, and every cubic yard of water that gets through the gates means golden dollars lost. You understand?"

"Sure. Close the gates, man. The gates are built in, aren't they?"

"They are. And the dam is high enough to hold the first week's run of water. I sent out orders to close the gates this morning as soon as the rains started. The man I sent brought back word that the dam was

covered by greasers who refused to work and who wouldn't allow any one to approach the dam."

"A strike?"

"Call it that. I went myself to close the gates—" He paused a moment and flashed a glance up to Margaret as she finished her swift bandage. Not a word of gratitude—only the silent look. "When I reached the dam," he went on, "I was stopped by the mob. They grew bolder. I tried to force my way through. Some one of the greasers drew a knife. I knocked him down. Then a gun was fired and the bullet glanced across my head, stunning me. As I dropped some of the boys who were with me—Delaney and the rest—dragged me back. The Mexicans didn't follow. They were satisfied with keeping me from the dam."

"Are they striking for higher pay?"

"They're striking to keep the dam from being finished. They're gathered to keep the gates from being closed."

"Easy," nodded Marshal Vance. "I'll swear in twenty boys I know, and we'll make short work of that gang. Say the word, and swear to the necessity, Garth, and I'll have those gates closed in twenty minutes."

"With an armed force?"

"Only way to handle the greasers. I know 'em!"

"I know them also," said Garth, "and there's one subject that they value more than their lives."

"Eh? Their religion?"

"Right! I've heard chatterings of it since last night. Some devil has spread the word among the Mexicans that if they let the dam be completed the rising of the waters will cover San Vicente up the valley, and the soul of every man who has worked on the dam will be lost. They're frightened out of their wits, and they'll fight as men fight to save their souls."

"Then," barked the marshal, "there's only one thing to do. Call in the State militia."

"The moment you show armed force, Vance," said Garth, "those fellows will use dynamite, and blow the dam from its foundations."

"God!" breathed the marshal. "Then what's the hope?"

"One small hope. I've sent an automobile up the valley to bring Padre Miguel from San Vicente. The priest from the mission itself will surely be able to convince them."

"Will he try?"

"I think he will. The men I sent will tell him exactly how the case stands. I know Padre Miguel. He has the courage of a crusader. They'll be back in a moment, and we'll see from the windows what he can do with them. I want him to make a talk to the crowd, and I think he will."

Margaret's heart went out to the pale, drawn face of Garth, and yet it beat with pride in the strength of Henry Tyson. With his single hands he had set a force in operation which in a night could check all the powers of Garth.

Garth would win, in the end. She even yearned for a man's form so that she could fight at his side, but she was glad from the bottom of her soul that the victory must have its price.

For Garth had told her, briefly, what passed between him and Tyson the day before, and at the end Garth had smiled.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

LA PALOMA.

THERE was no flinching in Garth in the crisis. He talked quietly with the marshal, taking up one plan after another, like a purchaser examining samples, and laying them down again, unsatisfied, but with the determination to go on until he had what he wanted. Now and again, when a fresh roar of shouts rose from the hordes of peons who covered the dam, he raised his head a little, and a cold gleam came in his eyes.

Yet, on the whole, he was cool as a general who directs a victorious army under fire. She was seeing what men can be, and she rose to the occasion, for there was in her the blood of the fighter.

"Now," said Garth, raising his great bulk from the chair, "here comes the padre—and the crisis for the dam."

"And for Edward Garth," murmured Margaret to herself.

The clouds over La Blanca had broken up under a stiff breeze, and now a shaft of the morning sun struck in behind Margaret and made her bright hair like a halo around her face; and she sat with her head far back and her eyes and her smile for Garth alone, though every other glance went out the windows toward the dam.

An automobile had swung up the slope from the valley and from it dismounted three men who walked still higher up the slope behind the Padre Miguel. His head was bare and the morning light gleamed on his bald head, and the rising wind twisted at his rusty robe.

Straight toward the thickest of the crowd of Mexicans he walked. They gave back before him, opening a broad pathway. The word seemed to pass with the speed of rumor through the idle host; from the outskirts they packed in increasing numbers toward the left flank of the dam, and when at length the padre stood on a rising bulwark of concrete there stretched on all sides of him a black mass of humanity with bronzed faces upturned, and the light of the morning sun struck aslant across that bronze ocean.

The wide murmur of the multitude swept up from the dam and reached the office of Garth and the silent group within it. A silence followed over the entire scene; the padre had lifted his arm.

They could follow him from period to period by the slow gestures of his arms. They knew, from the office of Garth, that when he swept his arm up the valley he was speaking of the mission of San Vicente. And there was a sad solemnity about the thought of the old priest, talking there before the throng, and pleading for the destruction of his own church. They could tell the power of his words. For most of the crowd near by followed the gestures of the padre with ripples heard and there. At length he stretched out both his arms and raised his face. Of one accord the whole mass fell upon their knees.

"He wins!" cried Garth, in an indescribable voice. "They are praying. And at his feet!"

The secretary beside him called suddenly: "The water! It comes! The gates, Mr. Garth!"

And far up the valley they saw, clearly, with the morning sunlight upon its face, a downward rushing wall of water, dark brown, carrying great trees in its forefront as easily as sticks and straw. Two yards high, it swept on with an increasing murmur.

"Now!" pleaded the secretary. "May I give the order? May I send out the men to the gates?"

"Let this rush of water go," answered Garth, straining his eyes toward the priest. "It's hard, but what does an hour's flow of water amount to? It's the padre! Can he hold them in spite of the flood?"

For now the wall of water, striking the broader cañon just before the dam, spread with innumerable foamy rushings, and the sound of its voice went in a deep roar up to the office.

"Can he hold them?" repeated Garth. "Can the padre keep them to their prayer? If he does, we have won! Listen!"

There was a wavering and a lifting of bent heads in the crowd as the sound of the water poured up to them, but the padre stepped forward on his broad bulwark. They saw his arms stiffen. His head went farther back. They knew he was raising his voice and making it battle with the rushings of the water.

And he conquered! For one by one, and by degrees, men who had risen to their knees to watch, dropped back to their attitudes of devotion. They saw the movings of brown hands making the sign of the cross; peering more closely they could even make out lips that moved in the prayer. It held for a long moment, and then another sound rose.

It began, thin and weird and sad with infinite distance, infinite yearning. At first it was something to be guessed, rather than known, like the voices and the choruses of the winter wind, but at length it grew, it gathered volume, the watchers and the listeners around the big form of Garth heard now the unmistakable strains of "La Paloma!"

For another moment the strain gathered

volume slowly, and the padre was seen to be exerting every effort to keep his flock from listening—to hold them to their devotions.

It was vain. In a wave, every throat in the crowd suddenly burst into song. Every devotee sprang to his feet. A swell of mightily chorused singing swept up the valley side and burst about the walls of the office building.

Patriotism had been cunningly blended with superstitious fear by him who started that singing, and the combination of the two elements was too much for the host of peons. Still the poor padre strove against the music, but all backs were turned to him.

The song rose higher still, shrill with an ecstasy of triumph. The Mexicans danced on the top of the broad dam. Their wide sombreros flared to and fro. They shrieked and called to the brown rush of precious water below; they struck each other over the shoulders in a nameless delight. San Vicente was saved, and a thorn was placed in the crown of the "gringo"!

But Padre Miguel? He turned slowly away, at length, and made his way as slowly up the slope toward the little office building, followed by the three others as a sort of rear guard.

Garth began to laugh, a thin sound like the laughter of an hysterical girl, and terrible coming from his great throat. He turned upon the group.

"My friends," he said, "I have lost. San Vicente is stronger than I!"

And he dropped heavily into his chair behind the desk and sat with his great head supported in both hands. Not a sound, then, from all the room; and the jubilant yelling from the dam surrounded them, with a keen note of barbarian triumph which roused Garth from his stupor of the moment. No blank stare in his eyes; but there rose in them a sharpening gleam of the battling instinct. The door opened; Padre Miguel entered the room.

His eyes encountered those of Garth, and his head failed.

"Señor," he said, "I have been too weak."

Big Garth rose and moved with that ease which told of strength more than the budg-

ing of great weights. He took the padre by the arm and seated him in a chair beside the desk.

"The devil," he said, "is a fairly strong foe—even for you, good Padre Miguel!"

And this man was not a gentleman? With all her heart, Margaret wished that Hal could have heard.

"But tell us what caused you to fail, padre. Was it the sound of the rushing of the water?"

"It was not that, *señor*. When I spoke before those many men there came a strength in me, *señor*, that made my voice loud, so that these who heard me kneeled, and even over the noise of the flood I still made them hear me. I had a thought while I stood there that the noise of the water was the voice of the fiend; and I struggled against it."

He smiled deprecatingly around the room, and his mild eyes flitted from face to face. "It was a sinful and proud thought, and I was punished for it. But think, ah, think, *señor*! In another moment I should have had them all as gentle as sheep to do as I bade them! The water came. I raised my head and spoke more loudly. Still they heard. They were chained. They bowed their heads and

prayed. It is good for the soul of man when he turns his eyes on the dust and sends his thoughts up to God. So!

"And as I spoke I fixed my eyes on the edges of the crowd. For there were some who could not hear me. I tried, and though some of these kneeled even as the closer ones, a few remained standing. More and more dropped to the ground, and a sense of power came in me.

"Then I saw, far off on the edge of the crowd, the face of a man whom I could not touch. He had a pale face, not like the brown ones around him. And I thought that I could catch the glitter of his eyes even at the distance. The morning sun, see you, was upon him.

"Toward him I directed my eyes and my voice, and my thoughts. But I could feel that he was smiling.

"Presently he turned to those near him and spoke, with many gestures. And after a moment, they began that song—'La Paloma!'"

Garth closed his large hand.

"Padre," he said softly, "good padre, can you name that man?"

"I can, *señor*, and the Lord have mercy upon his sinful heart. It is Señor Henry Tyson."

This story will be concluded in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

THE MANUSCRIPT OF EARTH

BY LOUIS GINSBERG

WHEN I am tired with my books,
And all their vain, pretended mirth,
I like to lie and read at last
That wondrous manuscript of Earth.

Then eagerly my soul will drink
A thousand tales that are revealed:
The legend of eternal spring;
The glory of the sky and field.

For all these magic, deathless tales,
These miracles of sun and sod,
Upon the manuscript of Earth,
Were written by the hand of God!

Gotham's Wife

by Kenneth Perkins



WHEN Judith Duane's husband came home that afternoon for lunch, a grave excitement was written on his face. The equanimity he assumed as he took off his overcoat and gloves was, Judith knew, the result of forcible restraint. He stepped into the sitting-room with her before saying anything, for it seemed that he was afraid to begin lest his voice be difficult of modulation.

He surveyed her for a moment. Her silver blond hair, the exquisitely clear eyes staring expectantly at him, the half-parted lips, the delicately pink upturned face—all these details assumed a new significance. Duane noticed that his wife shrank slightly. He was frightening her.

"I know you would have told me all about it if I had seen you at breakfast this morning." He was glad he could start that way.

"It was a terribly awkward thing," she began hurriedly. "I'm glad you did not wait up for me."

"I heard this morning that Chantry went to his club for breakfast dressed in his evening clothes."

"Naturally. He left here about half-past six," Judith said naively. "It was half-past six by my clock—the little ormolu clock. It's always wrong."

"Half-past six!" Duane exclaimed. "But the other guests got home at two!"

The girl colored angrily. Her first im-

pulse was to explain everything rapidly—in a breath; but Duane's excitement, his enraged eyes, his last statement bore down upon her like an accusation.

"How is it you've been hunting up all that information about the other guests?" she said coolly.

"I haven't been hunting up anything. Three of us were at the club half an hour ago. We talked about King Craven's dinner and they said they'd come home at two. Then they began to talk about Chantry's not going home all night. They laughed about it and over his notoriety as a man-about-town. They said he must have been out for a great old time last night. They didn't know that it was you he brought home."

Judith stepped over to the window. The light streamed through cream gauze curtains on the silken hair and the morning gown which revealed one pale, youthful shoulder.

"It's not you I'm questioning or blaming for an instant," Duane pursued in the same vibrant, excited tone. "I hope you get that at the start. It's this rascal Chantry. If it had been some one else, I would say nothing more about it. But as it is, I want to get everything straight about him first."

"How do you know it was his fault? How do you know it was any one's fault?"

"Perhaps it was mine then," the husband rejoined. "Perhaps I should have let

that engagement of my own go and taken you to the dinner myself. But you were spending the day with Mrs. King Craven and I thought surely she would see that you got home all right."

"Then you're blaming it on Mrs. King Craven?" the girl retorted.

"Yes, that would perhaps be a very good place to put the blame—if she turned you over to a cad like Chantry."

"Well, it wasn't his fault!"

The husband smiled. "I admit it's hard to blame Chantry. It's always hard. He is the kind of coward who does things so the blame always happens to fall somewhere else. He's been caught in escapades before, and the men at his club despise him because he always sneaks out of it and brushes up his own reputation. I'll never forgive Mrs. King Craven for putting you in his hands."

"She let Chantry bring me home because he lives in the same block. His studio is right around the corner." The girl still had her lithe, youthful back turned. She spoke out of the window with a quiet and still timid scorn. "It was the natural, sensible thing for us to come home together."

"That part's all right, I admit," Duane said, "but now go on and tell me the rest."

She turned to look at him. Talking had given vent to his passion. He now seemed cool and infinitely more powerful. She could not ignore his firm, handsome mouth, his dark beseeching eyes, the tall, finely groomed figure so close to her and so strong.

"What do you mean by 'the rest'?" she began firmly, but then seeing his mouth again, she broke into a torrent of explanation: "We were lost. He asked the way, but there were only a few people on the road and they mixed him up more—he said. We were going—tearing along—for an hour in the opposite direction."

"What else did he tell you?" the husband asked.

Judith sensed the new tone and it changed her. She spoke slowly. "It was cold—chilly cold and damp, so that I was frozen. He noticed it—it was a short while before sunrise and he still didn't know the best way home, so we stopped at a little house—"

"You stopped?"

"It wasn't like a farmhouse. Although it was lonely and bleak. It was more like a little country place. Chantry said he would ask the way because it was the first house with lights we had seen. We went in so I could get something hot. I had a chill. When we went in he said that it was a roadhouse and that I should not tell people I had been there at that hour. I became suddenly panic-stricken. I was afraid Chantry would take my hand. He kept asking if I felt cold. I must have thought he was going to kiss me, because I ran out, and he came out a moment later with my fur and said they'd told him how to get home. But I'm sorry that that part of it happened because I know Chantry is really a fine-hearted man—"

As Duane stared at her she could see that his whole figure had become tense. He finally spoke with exaggerated care.

"Do you know, Judith, you are as unsophisticated as a little baby. Up till this moment I thought—I hoped—that the affair really was a mishap, but now the whole thing is clear to me!"

"Why, of course it was a mishap," his wife pouted. "You don't mean to suspect Chantry of deliberately—"

Duane interrupted her. "Chantry is a beast. He puts up a fine front in society. He's a good clubman, and hostesses think he is perfect. But some of us at the club know what he really is; he will get a woman in a situation like that and no matter how pure and helpless she is, he has no pity. He crashes into her life and then explains to the world it was all due to some little unforeseen accident. The worst of it is, he always gets away with it. But this is one time he is not going to get away with it."

"Gary, I can't understand a word you're saying!"

"He knew you were inexperienced and trusting, so he tried that cowardly game of his again on you—my wife! And in the same dirty, cowardly way. He thought he could make it look like an accident, did he? It just happened that he failed because you are so easily scared. But as it is, he's put you in a damnable—a disgraceful—light, and he's going to pay for it."

The girl rushed to him. She looked up fearfully into his eyes and then put her bare, cool arm about his neck.

"What do you mean, Gary! There's nothing to worry about now. It's all over! Everything is all right now!" She looked up eagerly but could see the flame coming back into his eyes. "What do you mean by saying that—" she cried—"that he's going to pay?"

"He's going to—I—" Duane's sentence broke and he looked at his wife with a sudden bewilderment. "I am going to—"

"To what?"

He released himself. "Well, I can't tell you now." He took his hat and hurried out. Judith heard the elevator bell and the clicking of the iron filigreed door.

She thought her husband had come to a sudden enraged decision. But it was not a decision; it was a conflict—a baffling, insoluble conflict: Chantry, a debauchee, had attacked his wife in a cowardly, underhanded way, and had succeeded just far enough to ruin her name—the name of Duane. That was enough to make any man fly into a passion. It was certainly not a state of affairs productive of cool decisions.

In that first sudden spasm of anger Duane felt that Chantry should pay in the dearest way—the just way. But how? What could that mean—"the dearest way, the just way?" Both men were in the center of New York. Their ways were the ways of New York. Duane was surrounded by walls, by men, by laws. As he stalked into the great cañons of buildings he suddenly came to himself.

It was the first time in his life he had felt the impulse to kill. It crashed into a thousand other instincts which the ages had raised and strengthened. For a block of rapid, jostled walking he analyzed it with comparative calm and realized that he had made a resolve which fought against every element of that scene: every gigantic building, every stone wall, every iron gate, every thundering machine, every man. His whole intent, sudden, impassioned, feverish as it had been, suddenly floundered. He must make Chantry pay, he said to himself, but how? How could a civilized man meet

a civilized enemy? If he did meet him, what could he do?

"I must think first," Duane kept mumbling to himself. "I have a great thing to do. But I must do it—as it should be done here in the heart of New York."

When he took the subway to his club, he felt as he rode that he was being hurled along an iron-bound, man-beaten track. He looked out of the window at the black, rushing walls, and against the pane he could see his own face.

Of all those adamantine man-made things, the iron, the fetters, the screaming tunnels, there was one little flash of an age-old primitive freedom. He saw it in the pane; the heavily shaded eyes, the firm mouth and the set jaw of his own face.

"I must protect her," he affirmed resolutely. "She is an innocent, childlike woman who knows nothing of the danger she is in. I must do something definite—great—it is demanded of me!"

If it had been the plain old triangle, Duane argued to himself, the problem would be easily settled. A decree made by man, sanctioned by the world, would settle it. But this problem could not be settled by a divorce court. It was a primitive problem of a beast attacking a man's mate. He remembered a sketch his wife had at home of a caveman and his mate. It was into that world that Duane had suddenly projected himself.

But in his club he smashed again into a monument of civilized elegance. "I will think here," he had resolved. But his confusion was more complete—more baffling. He was tormented by the green shaded electric lights, the mahogany tables, the dim Italian ceiling. If he looked through the lace curtains it was to see crowded omnibuses, high-powered cars, elegantly clothed people moving along.

"I must stay away from Chantry!" he told himself. "But then—" He drifted into the quiet gloom of the dining-room where a soft-footed butler and waiter put steaming dishes before him; there was a bird, sizzling, done to a turn, the odor of which evoked no hunger so strong as the other insatiable hunger within him.

He noticed that right in that darkly pan-

eled, tapestried room there were men who had divorced their wives. What a simple problem theirs had been compared to his. Their wives had wronged them, but Duane's wife had been wronged. He must do something. It was demanded of him. If she had wronged him, he could divorce her, but she had not.

He fancied that his clubmates were staring at him with a distant, primitive scorn in their eyes. The sharp laughter of men at the next table broke in upon him like a whip upon his back. He signed his lunch check shakily and then for a moment chewed at the little indelible pencil which made marks about the corners of his mouth.

He left everything on the white linen untouched and hurried aimlessly back to the lounging-room where he sank into the deep leather recesses of a chair and tried to light a cigar with his trembling fingers. From the bay window a monotone of gossip drifted to him. There were phrases which suddenly struck a chord within that jarred and others which passed him with as little response as if he had been deaf. But once a portly, white-haired man made a remark: "Do you know, it is my belief that right here in the heart of New York the same epic strains are found in some men, the same fierce heroism, as I imagine existed before history, before civilization—before Adam."

"In some men, perhaps," a youthful, cynical voice rejoined. "But not if they've lived in New York long."

"Ah, but you're mistaken," the other objected tremulously. "In some men there are instincts which cannot be changed by all these fine-spun fripperies of Manhattan. Elemental things can't be changed."

"Perhaps they can't be changed," the cynical voice answered respectfully, "but they can put on a masquerade of silk pantaloons. There are men—beasts if you wish—who can go from the cradle to the grave as a paragon of New York fashion."

"No, not beasts—not beasts!" the old gentlemen objected. "Giants! Primitive men! They can wear top hats, swallow tails, silk vests—but something will come along like a call and then—"

Duane jumped up and without waiting for the old gentleman to finish he stamped across the velvet carpet with the intention of immediately returning to his home. The business engagements that afternoon dwindled into insignificance. It was his home that called him where an elemental situation was assuming life-and-death proportions.

He avoided the subway with a distinct fear. He could not bear those screaming walls a second time. The park, through which he rode in a cab, mollified him for a brief moment. There was a wildness about the birch and elms which was not discordant to his mood. But even here he realized that this little glimpse of the true earth was bounded on all four sides by mountains of buildings. Again he felt the choking conflict. The granite boulders, the scrub oaks, the shimmering lake, were all a bit of the elemental world crammed into a parallelogram of man-made bonds.

"If I do see him," Duane muttered mechanically, "I must not kill him. I shall see him, but I shall not—no, I cannot kill him!"

When he walked into his apartment Judith met him and knew at a glance he had not seen Chantry. His eyes, darker and finer looking than usual because of the slightly dilated pupils, told her that the excruciating conflict was still aflame within him. She ran up to him.

"Gary! Where have you been, and what have you been doing? You've got ink about your mouth, and you're worrying yourself sick! Have you had lunch at the club?"

"I'm not going to worry any longer," he said quietly. "I'm going to see Chantry and settle it!"

"But, Gary dear, there's nothing to see him about. It's all over." She brushed back his thin lock of black hair. "Now come and have something to eat. Then you can go back to the office. If you go to Chantry's I'm afraid, Gary, there might be terrible consequences—something that would change your whole life."

"No, not that," Duane said quickly. "I've thought that part of it all over. I can't see that it would be right to kill him."

He hurried on, seeing the fright this had brought to her face. "It's not going to be anything like that. I'm just going to see him and get everything straight."

"Even then, it will only make a scene," his wife implored. "You can't go there and do that. Think of what it would do to us socially—and then your business! No, it's ridiculous to think of it any further."

"But I'm not going to let it go this way!" Duane cried. "He's wronged you—you who belong to me! I've got to do something. Everything within me is crying out to fight. If you didn't belong to me I might not feel this terrific yearning within me to kill." He paced up and down the floor and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief which he kneaded into a lump between his hands. "And my head!" he breathed painfully. "My head's simply bursting."

Judith felt his hot dry hand.

"I'm afraid you're not well," she said anxiously. "You simply must stop worrying about this ridiculous thing. You'll be getting a fever."

"I'll be all right as soon as this thing is settled. But now it's driving me to distraction: there's a sort of strain here in my head. I'm afraid it's getting the better of me. In the subway I saw—" He checked himself before confessing to a ridiculous fear at his own reflected face. "Well, it was nothing—just a sort of a—well, a whim. And in the club I felt as if I were in a box, and being crushed so that I could not move my arms."

"That's nothing," his wife reassured him like a mother talking to a child who has been dreaming. "I should think you would always feel that way at the club."

Duane did not hear her. He was rummaging through a portfolio of drawings in search of a charcoal sketch Chantry had presented to his wife. His immediate intent in hunting for this picture was vague in his mind. He felt that it might be a key to the relations the artist sustained towards Judith. When Duane did find the drawing he read the insignificant words: "To Judith Duane from Albert Cripps Chantry."

The picture itself struck a responsive chord in Duane's breast. As he held it to the light everything else about the room—the sparkling chandeliers above, the slender teakwood table, the faience pottery and the hooded fireplace beneath—faded into a monotone of shadow. All the light, like all Duane's jealousy and hate, was focused upon that one point.

He saw the face of a woman, pale, distinct, and with a touch of a strange emotion upon it. For a moment he could see nothing but that oval light in the smirchy charcoal sketch. Then he noticed the wild, unkempt hair falling about the woman's shoulders, a bone necklace about her full tanned throat, and at her feet a huge beast. Chantry had only sketched the hideous eyes and, with broad black strokes, a form crouching and tense.

The beast's jaws were opened so that the large saber teeth stood out in the overtone of dusky light. There was also the study of a nude man in heavy black, almost like a cartoon. An epic hero he was, with a brawny neck, hairy chest and legs. In his hands he held a stone ax ready to crash upon the skull of the black leopard.

A great thrill passed through Duane. Every hint of civilization had vanished from his memory. The ages of history seemed to crumble and leave just that one vision of a cave and a man protecting his woman from a beast. His own problem, he realized, was not the problem of courts and decrees—it was the cave-man's.

"What's wrong, dear," Judith was saying. "Your forehead's wet. You're trembling all over!"

Duane looked into her face. "It's that picture," he said; "it touched something in here. It's made me understand—made me decide."

"Why, how ridiculous, Gary! Just a drawing, and the critics said it was a horrible thing because it appealed to the animal in us."

"Yes, that's it—to the animal. That's just what it appeals to—if there is anything animal in this city!" Duane raised his voice excitedly. "I heard the men at the club say there's no more of the elemental hero in us. But there is! There is!

There's plenty of it right here in the heart of New York. I'll show you it's right here burning inside of me! I won't be a puny, civilized coward! I'll settle this thing as if there were no laws!"

He lurched into his room and drew out a drawer from his desk so that collars and cuffs and buttons scattered on the floor. He threw the drawer down, dashed out of the room and then down the marble stairs. Judith knew that he had taken a revolver with him.

Duane's first resolution that he must not see Chantry had faltered when he heard his clubmates talking. Then he had made up his mind that he must see Chantry, but that he would not kill him. Now a new resolve had gripped him: there was only one thing to do when a beast attacked the woman a man loved and who loved him. That was to fight—to leap upon the beast—as the cave-man did before Adam—and to kill.

He was met by a Japanese servant who ushered him into a sanctuary of velvet quiet. The dim, cool studio apartment was like some Buddhist temple against which the purpose that brought him there would strike a jangling chord. The background for the cave-man had been granite rocks and the roots of primeval oaks. Here Duane found himself in a setting delicate and rich with Afghan carpets, hanging lanterns of brass and jewels, incense burners of beaten silver. The caressing odor of frankincense baffled his passion.

He pictured for a moment how his wife would come after him—he knew perfectly well she would come. What a shock that scene would be to her—a silken-haired delicate modern woman—that hyper-civilized scene into which he was about to hurl an age-old passion. What fragile stuff that civilization seemed when it conflicted with his primitive hate. Even as he was about to reach into his hip-pocket he brought his hand away. He himself was a part of that elegant, costly world. Judith was a part of it. The man whom he wanted to kill was a part of it.

"I will speak to Chantry," he said to himself. "I must not do this thing as an animal would do it. I must think first.

That's what a man does. This is a complex matter: if Judith did not love me it would be easily settled in the divorce courts.

"The divorce triangle is something made clear by custom and law. But the defense of a pure woman—that is a different matter. I'm about to kill Chantry because he has compromised a pure woman. But I must be sure of his guilt first. I will talk to him. When Judith comes here we will all talk—and then I shall be assured I am right first before I act."

When Chantry came in, the two men stared at each other in a tense silence, broken shortly by a polite, modulated exchange of phrases: "Why, how are you, Duane?" and "So glad to see you!"

Duane let slip a conventional sentence or two, which made his lips tremble. "Sorry to interrupt your work." He even shook Chantry's slender, turpentine hand. That made things ever so much easier. Duane found himself looking into the artist's bashful gray eyes with considerable placidity. He was able to confess his errand in a tone so frank as to suggest a business transaction.

"I've come to see you about that little mishap of last night."

"Oh, yes, yes, yes," the artist said hurriedly. "So glad you came. I didn't know whether to call you up about it or not. Damn awkward, the affair was. I am glad you are taking it this way—I mean in such a frank fashion. Some men, you know, would brood about a thing like that. I must say I admire you."

"Thank you." Duane could not help darting a glance at Chantry's pale, moist forehead.

"You see, the trouble came about in this way," Chantry went on, afraid of a single moment of silence. "If I had taken the road with which I was most familiar we would have had to cross a bridge which, as I heard at King Craven's, was broken down, and then of course—"

"That part is all very clear," Duane broke in. He judged by the perspiration which was now trickling down Chantry's cheek-bones, that the situation was getting too tense. "My wife explained it all. But

in her explanation she made me see the problem in a very curious light. I find myself suddenly put in the position of protecting a pure, inexperienced woman."

Chantry wiped his forehead.

"You understand," Duane continued, "I have not a divorce triangle on my hands. I am familiar with that: we all are nowadays. This is something considerably more vital."

"Yes, a divorce problem would be infinitely easier to settle than—"

"Than what?" Duane prodded, feeling a sudden touch of anger.

"Than the problem you suggest of a man protecting a pure, child-like woman."

Duane flushed hotly. "I don't want you to misunderstand my visit, Chantry," he said in slightly louder tone. "I'd be a hypocrite if I pretended to come here as a friend."

"Surely you can't mean you—"

Duane refused to stop. "Judith, in her explanation of last night's trouble, did not quite clear you!"

The artist attempted a trembling smile. "Did she clear herself?"

"What the hell do you mean by that?"

"Just this: it was a damnably awkward place to be at that time of the morning. I can't get myself out by explanations, but I hope she can."

Duane tried to compose himself. He had an intimation that Chantry meant something else.

Chantry covered the silence: "A beast attacking a pure woman should be killed. It's a primitive 'cave' proposition. But—but—"

Duane steered the conversation against the rocks that both men had feared: "But a woman wronging her husband—"

"That is not a cave problem—"

"No, it's something for New York to settle," Duane admitted. "I myself would not fight under conditions like that."

Chantry sank down on a settee, taking a long breath as if a burden had fallen from his back. Duane felt that he had lost his advantage. He rather wished his adversary would continue stammering and wiping his forehead. He was much more apt to reveal secrets under those conditions.

Duane knew that his wife would arrive at any moment. He started out on a new track.

"It occurs to me that the key to this whole situation lies in something that Judith has hidden from me. My wife is a good woman; like many good women she keeps some of her more serious troubles to herself. She hides things from me, particularly when she thinks I will be worked up into an unnecessary and disastrous anger—"

"Why, I assure you," Chantry interrupted excitedly, "there's really nothing that you—"

"Something may have happened at that road-house which Judith, out of the tenderness of her heart, wants to hide from me."

"Why, my dear sir, I beg of you," Chantry pleaded; "believe me when I—"

Duane plunged on: "When my wife comes here, I think I may discover just the little bit of truth that will justify me in what I am going to do."

"When your wife comes here!" Chantry echoed, rising.

"She's coming. She saw me bring my revolver with me."

Chantry's delicate features whitened. He stepped back and groped for the table to support himself. Both men could hear the door-bell ring at that moment, and then the servant shuffling quietly down the hall.

"I am going to step into this next room," Duane said. "When my wife comes you will tell her I have not been here. Remember, I will be right behind the hanging, so that I can see and hear everything." Duane went to the rich green arras and then whirled around. He took out the little black revolver and turned the cylinder steadily so that Chantry could hear each click.

A moment before his wife was ushered in Duane drew the curtain in front of him. He caught a glimpse of the chinchilla cape she had thrown about her, and of a wisp of silken hair fallen loose on the pale face. He could hear a clock ticking, and far away, almost in another world, the jangle of street-cars, the rhythmic wheedling of a

hurdy-gurdy, and then the low, rapid, excited voice.

"Thank God he's not been here," she was saying. "But he's coming! What's the matter with you? How strange you look!"

There was a moment's pause, then the girl's voice stumbled on: "It's awful! He mastered his jealousy until this afternoon. When he came home I thought he had fought it out with himself and was trying to forget. Then he saw your painting. It was that turned him into a snarling brute! Why did you ever paint such a horrible thing? It might be the cause of your death—your own 'work of art,' as they call it. What irony!"

Duane could hear the heavy breathing in curious syncopation with his heart beats and the hurdy-gurdy.

"But don't be so terror-stricken, poor dear old boy," he heard the girl's voice again. "Come here!"

Duane looked through the curtains. The artist was standing, waiting with his arms hanging so that the veins of his beautiful hands filled with blood. His face was ashen, his jaw set, but the soft womanlike lips parted.

"For God's sake, don't say any more!" he whimpered through his teeth.

"My poor boy!" the woman went on, "I've frightened him. Come here and let me kiss you!"

Duane moved back. For a moment he felt as if a cold blade had passed slowly into him.

A chill struck him in the pit of his stomach and then crept up to his heart. He clutched the velvet arras about his face so that the world could not see him.

There were sentences, even the movement of chairs, to which he was partially deaf, as he was deaf to the long silence. His chill thawed to a curious, empty rage. He had had a great passion—a great desire—but the cause of it had suddenly ceased to exist. He had wanted to protect a woman from a beast. That was a great primitive yearning which when it melted into a formless complex of rage and self-pity left him inactive, grasping for motives, feeling suddenly that his real passion had

been merely a dream. It was a grim delusion. The picture of the cave-man seemed a mockery, a stretch of smirched paper.

Following his first impulse to kill them both, he stepped out in front of the curtain. Both the wife and the lover could see a ripple of uncertainty pass over the dark face. As he held up the revolver, Duane hung in the balance of two personalities; the tall, elegant, well-tailored, well-manicured aristocrat and the bestial primal man. The cave-man would murder both; the aristocrat would turn to man-made law.

In a moment the conflict was over. He had fought against law, against men, against the centuries; but now—he spoke to them in his cultured accents: "Now the problem is easily settled. How abhorrent this cave-business would be on plush carpets and by the light of lace curtains and filigreed lamps!"

"For God's sake finish it!" Chantry cried piteously. "Don't stand there and play with me any longer!"

"Oh, yes, this thing," Duane found himself still holding the revolver; "I couldn't think of using it. I couldn't afford to use it—a man in my position." He put it away in his hip-pocket carefully so that the grease would not smirch his coat.

"As I was saying, the problem is settled. The woman in the cave needs no protection: in this case she is not mine."

They saw how his passion had smoldered into a gray tranquility so that his sentences became crushingly logical and passionless: "Most men think that if their wives wrong them they must kill somebody about it! Could anything be more ridiculous? Why should I risk imprisonment—disgrace—for this woman? New York can settle this affair, and so can civilization. The modern man can settle it very conclusively and—comfortably."

He walked across the carpet and past the jeweled lantern which for an instant threw a halo of light on his thin hair. They heard him close the door softly and walk out. It was as if he had walked out of a jungle cave onto the well-paved sidewalk of Fifth Avenue.

The Progress of J. Bunyan by Stephen Chalmers

Author of "The Bronze Helmet," etc.

CHAPTER XV.

PILGRIM DROPS HIS BURDEN.

IT behooves me at this point to make some apology for having written so much about myself in these latter pages, when this chronicle was to have been mainly about the doings of my friend, J. Bunyan.

But from the time of leaving camp until my return under arrest, I knew nothing of Hobgoblin's actions; and I did not foresee at this time how great a part he was to play in my affairs.

As you shall see, however, the "great instrument" was presently to reappear.

In the jail I was left very much to my own reflections, the guard placed over me being either a surly fellow or harboring such hard thought against me that he could not bring himself to notice, much less speak to me. I was a disgrace to the Ironsides!

Seated in that cell with my head in my hands, I found it difficult to think, not so much that I was still suffering from the wound in my skull, but events had followed one another so rapidly that I was in a manner dazed.

I must tell all—or be hanged! The latter was a grim alternative. Yet I could not see that a full confession, did I make it, would be held "worth the price of my life;" rather would it tend to confirm the justice of my sentence.

None but I knew how seriously I had

offended against military discipline and our cause. I had had the king in my hands and let him escape. Had I informed the proper authority, Charles would now be under arrest, and the last fires of the still smouldering war extinguished in its own ashes.

To tell all would only make matters worse for me; that is—for they could not be made worse—it would make them no better. The thin chance that it might, if I confessed, did not weigh against the likelihood of bringing serious trouble upon Mistress Joyce and Ruth Prynne, and perhaps John Bunyan, too. Hobgoblin's part in the affairs of that garden might—probably would—come out, even if, in a mistaken effort to help me, he did not blurt out his share in the doings.

"Probably," did I say? Nay, they assuredly would. I thought I knew Jack Bunyan. I could see him—hear him (if I told him what had brought me to this pass) lowering his shaggy head and charging like a bull into the very heart of the matter, roaring out the whole story in his thought to save me, were that at all possible.

No! There was nothing I could think to do. Yet the hanging was less than twelve hours off!

Late that evening, while I was still brooding in my cell, I heard the guard being changed in the alley of the jail.

Presently I became aware that the new

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sentry was standing with his musket grounded just on the other side of the bars, and that a pair of eyes were on me in a way that made me feel conscious of being studied.

Looking up sharply, I recognized Hobgoblin as the new sentry on the death-watch. My heart gave a great leap of joy at sight of his rugged, homely face, which was now wrought into lines of deep pondering.

"Eh, lad," said he, speaking as casually as if we were not meeting under unusual circumstances, "'tis the devil takes the trick this deal. But the game is not done yet. I would say mayhap the Lord hath still an ace in hand, but the simile savors somewhat of the unfitting.

"But," he went on, dropping his voice after a glance up and down the prison alley, "first of all, tell me what hath led to this, lad?"

"Bunyan," I said, "do not ask me. I ha' pondered the whole matter, which hangs on me heavier than your own great burden, and I cannot speak—even to you."

"Then thou wilt hang heavy thyself!" said Bunyan.

"It would even seem so, Jack."

Hobgoblin shouldered his musket and took a few strides about the alley. Presently he halted again before the cell, grounded his musket with a bang, and gave a mighty snort. He glared at me; but then his eyes fell on my clothing, which he had not closely observed in that dim lantern-light until now.

"Eh?" he exclaimed. "Methinks I ha' seen that dress before!"

I said nothing. It might be, if he identified my clothing as that which he had seen "Richard Eveleigh" wearing in the garden, he would presently put two and two together and arrive at the truth, especially as he had probably already heard that I was under suspicion of having had dealings with *the person of the king*.

And if he did arrive at the main fact of the whole matter? A hope for my personal safety involuntarily sprang into being, only to be dashed immediately. Any such supposition of the actual facts that Bunyan might form on the evidence of my dress

and his own piecemeal knowledge could only prove my offense the more unpardonable from a military point of view.

"Ha!" cried Bunyan, careful, however, to keep his pitch to a vocal whisper. "So thou'st been adventuring on thine own account, and ha' suffered for it? That be like to the dress Master Weakspine wore, for a wager! Nay, I wager not; I *declare*!

"But how comes it, Master Sly?" he went on. "Did ye try odds with Master Weakspine and his pistol. Did ye find him a king's man, or—

"O-o-ooh!"

His face became stamped with stupefied amazement, and his mouth shaped itself into a capital O. He smote his head with his left hand, muttered: "Dolt!" and fell to pacing again.

But in a few moments he was back once more, plying me with questions; to all of which I replied "no" when he failed to hit the mark, and said nothing when he did. As my failure to deny was as good as any affirmative, I presently refused to answer at all. If Bunyan was to know the truth he must arrive at it himself.

Presently, to my wonder, Bunyan said, after a thoughtful period:

"Eh, but y' are a wiser fool than I thought. (Nay, I take back that word 'fool'; 'tis inviting of hell-fire.) But ye do well to keep still, Master Sly."

He came nearer the bars, and whispered quickly:

"For mark ye this, boy: there was purpose in choosing me relief guard. 'Twas thought, our acquaintance being common knowledge, that ye would speak free with me. But ye do well, if any good end is to be served, to keep thy tongue atween thy teeth; for no doubt"—and here again he glanced up and down the alley—"some other, unbeknown to me, is posted to overhear."

"Master Slythey, for instance," I suggested. "Art sure he is not at thine elbow, John?"

Bunyan stared at me, then burst out angrily:

"Not to *my* knowledge! Though now ye speak on't, I ha' no doubt the choosing of me was his—

"Slythey!" he muttered, pacing again. "By Gog and—and—I declare I begin to see!

"Slythey himself did suspect ere my dolt brains had a glimmer. Eh? For this he spied, then, from the tree. Eh? But that was days—a week ago! And if he knew then, why kept he his tongue still if he was spy for Cromwell? Yet that was before—the same day he was arrested.

"Twas he brought the word of the king at Sibbertoft. Then why, if he knew, even suspected, the Stuart at Eveleigh Manor, did he not inform and win further favor of Cromwell? Ah, but he may not ha' been sure—bided his time—and then this lad rushed in and spoiled his chance of bagging the game.

"Now do I begin to see—as through a glass, darkly. . . Slythey—"

All at once Bunyan stopped short in his pacing and muttering and stood like an image, wrought in stone, of a soldier shouldering a flintlock. His eyes stared stonily; his features became rigid in thought. But then again he fell to pacing the whole length of the alley with great strides, muttering the while to himself, but not addressing another syllable to me!

All I could gather from stray words which fell from his mouth, words which were as disconnected, head, body or tail of the rest of sentences not uttered, was that something he called "it" had happened again, even as it had happened time and again before.

Some great doubt seemed to be dispelled in the mind of John Bunyan.

"It is the proof—the proof!" he muttered. "Lord, I am satisfied! If I believe, help thou mine occasional unbelief; though, Lord, I make no conditions with Thee. But I still need a leg to stand upon, so pardon me that 'if'—"

"The instrument—of his ends! I, the gambler—drunkard—swearer of vain words—"

And so he continued pacing and muttering while the hours of that night passed, and every now and then the prison clock struck off a portion of my remaining period of life.

Still he did not speak to me, who was

sorely in need of a friend's consoling. My eccentric friend seemed wrapped up in his own, new, introspective joy. It was as if he had forgotten my very existence, to say nothing of the closing of that existence. He hummed snatches of hymn and psalm-tunes, quoted fragments of Scripture, and generally acted like a man struck by the mysterious lighting of religious fanaticism.

He seemed, too, all eager to be relieved from the unpleasant task of sentry over one condemned, ever perking up his head as the clock struck. His lips would move as he counted the strokes, after which they would move again as if he counted how many hours remained until four o'clock, when he would be relieved by the morning guard.

"Bunyan!" I cried in despair at last. "Have ye no word for me?"

"Sh!" was all the comfort I received in answer to my appeal; and he went on pacing and mumbling something about "a great task directly assigned." After that I lay down on the bench in my cell and fell into a kind of indifferent stupor.

It was nearly four o'clock in the morning when I was roused by a low, steady, almost supplicating voice. I raised myself and, turning my head, saw John Bunyan outside my cell. His musket was propped against the bars and he was on his knees, his hands clasped at his breast, his head bowed, and his eyes shut tight, for all the world like a child who thinks to pray better the more the light of the world is shut out.

At first I thought he was praying for me, and with but three hours between me and the gallows I had sore need of Heaven's consideration. But it was about himself he was praying; and a queer prayer it was. I have never forgotten a word of it, so stamped on memory are even the slightest happenings of that morning of suspense.

"O Lord!" prayed John Bunyan. "I make no bargains with Thee. But into my darkness hath come a great light. Truly doubt shall no more assail me, if—and Thou wilt forgive that little word?—if Thou wilt still hold a candle to light my way. Do not, I pray thee, destroy this faith which ha' come to me like a signpost in the wilderness of this world. Do not let

it seem but to lead me again to vile taverns lit with corpse candles—Jack-o'-lanterns—and all the glory shall be Thine.

"But nay! Anon I shall say amen. One word more. This day shall I toil in the service of righteousness, which is Thy service, O Lord. I ha' no gift of fine words. But what are words? 'Tis feelings Thou dost read. Thou knowest what that good Colonel Morgan meant at Edgehill—the same that I mean know now:

"O Lord, Thou knowest how busy I shall be this day. I may forget Thee, O Lord, but in Thy great mercy do not, I prithee, forget me!" Amen!"

As he uttered the last word the prison clock struck four and an outer door opened with a crash. Bunyan sprang to his feet, seized up his musket, and stood rigidly at salute as the relief sentry marched up the alley.

Then—and this was the cruelest blow to my heart—having exchanged a few words with the relief, John Bunyan, the only friend I thought would stick to the end, turned his back on me.

Without a word or a glance for his unhappy comrade he marched out of the guardhouse and went—I supposed—to his bed and to sleep.

In three hours I was to swing from the gallows, as the new sentry took pains to inform me the moment the outer door closed upon Trooper Bunyan.

CHAPTER XVI.

A ROPE, A BEAM, A LADDER!

ODDLY enough, the agony of the remaining three hours was nothing compared with that which had gone before, when, with John Bunyan within touching distance, I still clung half-consciously to a straw of hope.

Now that all seemed lost, and I must die in silence and without a friend, a curious apathy settled upon me. If I were to describe the main thing that was passing in my mind it would appear an absurdity. Yet, absurd as it no doubt is, the fact remains that I became intensely interested in the ticking of the prison clock.

I could not see this clock, and had been aware that there was such a thing in the guardhouse only by the occasional knelling of the hours. I had certainly not heard the ticking of it until now, when it began to come from a long distance, swelling louder and louder until it was like the regular footfall of oncoming destiny.

Do not, as is natural, conclude from this that my mind dwelt upon the relentless passage of time. Far from that, it seemed to me the clock was singing an old song which I had heard as a boy when my father took me to Plymouth, and for the first time I beheld the sea and ships. On that occasion I heard some tarry sailors chanting a grim old ballad as they hauled upon ropes.

And now again I heard that song, the notes dropping with mechanical precision of time from the prison clock, and my imagination making almost real the clucking pendulum's fancied enunciation of words:

They call me Hanging Johnny,
Away-i-oh!
They call me Hanging Johnny,
So hang, boys, hang!

For a long time I sat listening to the brazen voice. It beat upon my senses not unpleasantly, although Heaven knows there was nothing pleasant about the matter of the song. It appeared to be the ballad of the hangman himself. Hardened sinner that he was, he had stopped at nothing in the practise of his art:

First I hung my brother,
Away-i-oh!
And then I hung my mother,
So hang, boys, hang!

I caught myself listening intently in order not to miss the rest, and felt a great irritation when, arriving at the third verse, the brazen voice in the ticking clock refused to proceed further, but kept on repeating and repeating the same thing over and over and over:

A rope, a beam, a ladder,
Away-i-oh!
A rope, a beam, a ladder,
So hang, boys, hang!

I knew the verse that should come after that very well; in fact, it was the only

verse I myself remembered; yet that clock refused to sing it, starting again that same maddening stanza:

A rope, a beam, a ladder—

Next time I tried to assist the clock over the obstructing verse, knowing very well that the whole fantasy was in my own distraught wits, and that I could change the verse if I had will enough.

“‘*And so we’ll hang together,*’” I tried to supply. But no! That clock would have none of it, and still persisted:

A rope, a beam, a ladder,
Tick—tock! Tick—tock!

A rope, a beam, a ladder—

Then with a loud, brazen chuckle—

So hang, boys, hang!

The prison clock stopped singing long enough to strike the hour of seven!

There came a tread of feet in the alley. My cell door was swung open and I was invited to come out by Sergeant Okey, who was backed by a squad of troopers.

He did not look me in the eye, nor did any of my late comrades. They were ashamed either of me or of themselves—perhaps a little of both. They did not bind me then, not until I was at the gallows foot a few minutes later. Still in my “royal” raiment I walked out between them into the sunshine of a perfect morning.

They led me into the middle of the encampment. There, in a cleared space, I saw a newly erected gallows towering above the heads of the Parliamentary soldiers formed in square. Mounted on a great horse near the gibbet was Oliver Cromwell himself, attended by a number of officers, including Captain Giles Bombard.

A passage was made for me in one side of the square, and through this I was led. My eyes were fixed upon the scene before me, particularly on the gibbet against which a ladder leaned, and on the face of Cromwell, which was cold and immobile as iron. Captain Bombard’s chin was drooped on his breast.

When I paused at the foot of the ladder

and surveyed the faces of the men composing the square, I saw not one that was in the least friendly or in sympathy. Hard and unforgiving were these men for the stain I had placed upon our colors.

The front line of that side of the square facing the gallows was made up of troopers (on foot) of my own company. I did not see John Bunyan among them, however.

Now they bound my hands behind me. While they did so one fellow adjusted the dangling noose about my neck and I became aware of a voice quietly reciting words of prayer almost at my ear. Turning, I discovered Jonas Slythey in this “spiritual comforter.”

“Ha, Master Shedskin!” said I. “Thy coat of many colors is of a godly hue this fine morning!”

But he paid no heed—just went on praying—his eyes piously upturned to the blue skies. Or was it the rope he studied?

Now a fellow who officiated as hangman gruffly ordered me to mount the ladder. I stared at him for a moment, somehow expecting him to clear his throat and begin to croak his dismal chant:

A rope, a beam, a ladder,
Away—i—oh!

But he only repeated his command, this time elbowing me toward the ladder. For dignity’s sake I obeyed, moving away from his touch.

I had some difficulty in climbing the ladder with my hands tied and the loose rope tending to trip me. I was assisted a little over half-way up and there commanded to stop while the hangman drew the rope taut from below. Then I saw that the method was to withdraw the ladder and leave me dangling on a short rope.

While the hangman drew in the slack and made the end secure I looked down at Cromwell’s face. He was studying me grimly, but did not say a word. He did not ask, or cause any one to ask, whether I had anything to say. I think he was satisfied that I would not speak and—he was a man who never wasted words.

It was quite clear that he knew I had chosen to die rather than explain my recent acts. Perhaps he surmised that I kept

silence to shield others. In any event he had apparently decided that the only profit to be derived was in making my execution a daunting spectacle to others.

Then I felt a faint tremor run up the timbers of the ladder, as if a heavy hand had fallen upon it. My hour had come!

The ladder stirred under me, but the first effort to dislodge it from the gallows post failed. I heard the hangman summon another fellow to "bear a hand." But before solid footing could be removed from under me there came a welcome interruption.

It was heralded by a roar from that side of the square to the left of Cromwell. Through the formation burst a trooper whose shaggy head, without a helmet, glowed ruddily in the sunlight.

It was Hobgoblin Jack Bunyan!

With his powerful right arm he almost dragged a young woman after him and pushed her toward Cromwell.

I had a thought that she was Mistress Prynne, but my eyes were all for Bunyan in that moment. With a bellow of battle wrath he hurled aside the hangman, also the fellow who was about to assist in pulling the ladder from under me. Then, guarding the ladder from any who might lay hands on it, John Bunyan faced Cromwell.

He did not salute. In that moment his saluting any ordinary mortal would have been an odd thing, for there was that about him which was above men, something more than merely heroic—a Moses come from the mountain!

"In the name of the Most High God!" he cried. "*I command you—stop!*"

No one could have been more astounded than I, and certainly every one must have been less elated. There was an uproar, but no one took any immediate action, because no one seemed to command—except John Bunyan.

All eyes were fixed upon Oliver Cromwell, eyes wide with dismay, excitement and expectation. What would the iron man do in the face of this amazing act of insubordination and defiance?

But Knoll sat his horse unmoved. Only a faint smile flickered about his set mouth.

"Seize that man!" he commanded quietly, although his voice boomed in the stillness.

That broke the spell. A dozen men rushed toward Bunyan. But they laid no hands on him. Almost they seemed glad of a second interrupting disturbance.

Under the feet of Cromwell's horse that young woman had thrown herself upon her knees!

"Oh, I prithee stay one moment!" she cried. "Listen to me, and ye will not do that thing ye were come to do!"

Cromwell shot one look at the wroth face of Ruth Prynne, and raised a hand.

"Hold!" he cried to the men who still hesitated to lay hands on Bunyan.

And so matters still hung fire, while Cromwell looked steadily into the face of that maid and said:

"Which do ye come to save, mistress—that red-haired madman or this dastard on the ladder?"

"Both!" cried Ruth, who had risen to her feet and now stood facing up at Cromwell with her hands laid flat on her heaving bosom.

Then she must have seen something out of the corner of an eye, for she spun around, pointing a finger at the retreating figure of Jonas Slythey. Master Shedskin was stealing toward that gap in the square from which the men had rushed to seize Bunyan.

"Stop him!" cried Ruth.

"Bring that man back!" snapped Cromwell. And instantly Slythey found himself also in the toils.

Presently, amid a silence in which one could almost hear the breathing of the many there assembled, Oliver Cromwell sat his horse like a wrought image, his great brows lowering over boring eyes which moved slowly from me to Ruth Prynne, from the pasty-hued face of Jonas Slythey to Bunyan. The latter's countenance was illumined by a great radiance.

Over the general's face there crept gradually a look of dawning comprehension of matters still obscure, and about his mouth stole a slow smile of satisfaction.

"Conduct these four," he ordered Sergeant Okey, who had charge of the escort; "conduct these four to my quarters."

"For the present ye may dismiss," said he to one of his colonels; "but leave the gallows standing."

And so for the moment at least I was reprieved. I was assisted down the ladder and my hands untied. Presently I found myself staring, stupefied, into the eyes of John Bunyan and Ruth Prynne. Hers were wide with fear and excitement, but John's were alight with utter confidence in his own powers. Slythey stood apart with a soldier flanking him on either side, and I never saw craven terror so clearly depicted on a human animal's face.

So ended that scene of the hanging—the interrupted hanging, I should more rightly say; and Bunyan, Ruth, Slythey and I were escorted to that house which was Cromwell's headquarters.

But as I went despair settled down upon me again. I found myself wishing that John had not interrupted; for by now my agony of dying would have been over.

For what explanation could either Ruth or Bunyan make that would save me—that would not make matters worse for all concerned? And I was not thinking wholly of Joyce then, either.

For now John Bunyan, who had no doubt acted thus rashly in the hope of saving my life, must suffer punishment for his own high-handed behavior.

As it seemed to me in that moment, the situation was in no way bettered—except, perhaps, that I was still unchanged.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE REVELATION OF JOHN.

IN enduring lines and unfading colors my memory holds a picture of us as we were grouped before Oliver Cromwell in his quarters that day. He again sat behind the kitchen table, a colonel at his right and another at his left.

I was in the center, facing the general, and flanked by Okey's guard. On my left was Ruth Prynne and on my right, John Bunyan. To Ruth's left was Jonas Slythey, whose face, as I caught an occasional glimpse of it, was pallid and glossy with a kind of cold sweat.

Cromwell surveyed our faces one by one. Finally he appeared to decide that his first interrogation should be addressed to Ruth Prynne.

In this I read the shrewdness of the man, for so he might hear and judge of her explanation before that explanation was possibly influenced by what she might hear another say—John Bunyan, for instance.

"Now, little maid," said Cromwell, with a paternal air of tolerance, real or merely assumed for his purpose, "what have ye to say that will explain your pleading back there by the gibbet?"

Ruth Prynne gulped several times and seemed to have difficulty in finding her tongue. Bunyan, no doubt sensing Cromwell's purpose in first hearing the maid, and perhaps fearful of her discretion, took a step forward, cleared his throat, and began in a loud fashion:

"Sir!—"

But Cromwell checked him instantly.

"Silence, ye red-haired disturber! Ye will ha' full opportunity anon to explain your words and acts, which I warrant ye, will take much explaining. Have a care o' that tongue o' thine till 'tis bidden, or I warn ye it may choke ye on a rope's end. Speak, maid!"

"Sir," faltered Ruth; but again the *deus ex machina* broke in:

"I say 'tis not fair that the maid should be—"

"Thunder!" roared Cromwell, and his voice sounded like that same. "What ha' we here? Who is this scum o' the ditch-side that dares interrupt me?"

"I, sir," said Bunyan, with a curious, earnest dignity. "Though but a tinker by trade, yet am I, an instrument of God, and this I do say with all respect to those in lesser authority."

Lesser authority! Noll fairly gasped.

"This savors of blasphemy!" said the colonel at his right.

"The man's mad!" said the colonel on the left.

Yet Cromwell did not order Bunyan to the guardhouse instant as he would have done under ordinary circumstances. Instead, after his first start of amazement, he studied the trooper with curiosity, as if he

had been some new and interesting type of religious fanatic. Then, concluding no doubt that tact would win more than force, and that there was more in this situation than met the eye, he said quietly:

"Trooper Bunyan, ye will best serve your own ends, and the ends of all concerned mayhap, if ye exercise patience, even as I do, though I warn ye not to push mine too far. Let the maid speak. Ye will be given fair opportunity anon."

"But—"

"*Enough, I say!*" And Cromwell's fist came down on the table with a crash.

Bunyan condescended to take a hint and subsided for the time being. Ruth Prynne then began her story.

There was nothing new in it to me, where I had hoped I might learn something of those matters which were still more or less wrapped in mystery.

I did observe, however, that as she spoke she glanced nervously in the direction of Jonas Slythey. Plainly she was more afraid of this man than she was of the great Noll; and Master Slythey kept eyeing her in a manner which was less fearing than subtly threatening, I thought.

Ruth merely stated that, of her certain knowledge, I had not aided the king in his escape; that, on the contrary, I had suffered the wound to my head in a rash attempt to capture the king single-handed.

"How say ye, lass?" Cromwell asked sharply, while the two colonels exchanged glances of amazement. "Tried to capture the king single-handed?"

"Even so," said Ruth simply, and she proceeded to describe the manner of it.

"And where, prithee," asked Cromwell when she had done; "where happened all this?"

Ruth turned pale and stared in dumb misery at Cromwell.

"Sir—" the "great instrument" began again.

"*Silence!!*" Cromwell roared, this time in a mighty fury.

His eyes flashed back to Ruth Prynne and he said, half to himself:

"Now we come to the marrow of this bone. Where, maid, did these things happen? In what house—place?"

Still she did not answer, and her eyes fell away from Cromwell's intent gaze to the floor.

In that moment, while Cromwell seemed to be turning over in his mind a possible reason for her refusal to answer—that she was sheltering the principal, perhaps, even as I was—I saw Slythey in the act of whispering in Ruth's ear. Where I stood, with only the maid's head between my ear and Slythey's lips, I heard what he whispered quite clearly, although Cromwell himself was too preoccupied with his thoughts to observe the passage.

"Hast cleaned the mud from thy shoes and thy mistress's?" the turncoat whispered.

It was a moment or two before that breath of speech carried any significance to me; then the meaning flashed, a sudden, great illumination. Slythey had overseen the burial of old Henry Falconer—in the manor garden, no doubt, and by these two women. A strange task for fair hands; yet I could see how they had not dared summon outside help if they hoped to conceal the rest of the manor's secret.

I could understand now why Ruth feared Slythey in this hour. Whatever she knew about him—for probably she understood why he had persecuted her mistress—he, in turn, held a card against her in the play.

It was characteristic of Cromwell that, gaining no direct answer to his direct question, he threatened no force but presently motioned the maid to stand aside. Then he looked at John Bunyan and said:

"*Now, ye wind-bag!* Lest ye burst, let 'scape some of thy matter."

So saying, he sat back in his chair like one resigned to the inevitable, but clearly with the intention of gleaning what grain he might from the mass of chaff.

To my surprise, John, once he had the floor to himself, was not a bit garrulous. On the other hand, I was not surprised that he told the whole story, as he knew it, without regard for anybody's safety—except mine.

He seemed to have but two ideas in his honest head: first, that I must be saved from the gallows at any cost; second, that

Heaven appointed him to accomplish this. Cromwell and the two colonels listened, at first with a half-bored tolerance, then with a growing, puzzled interest and a mildly impatient amusement; while John briefly—for him—told of his "Angel" and the pots and pans and his frequent deliverances by Providence when he did not in the least deserve Heaven's consideration and compassion, save, as he pointed out, "that mercy had some great purpose in't."

"The meaning was made clear to me," said he, his face all radiant with simple faith in his own behalf; "the answer to all my doubting and questioning. This is no dream, no trick of stray imagining, my masters. Out of that self-conscience which is the voice of God in us poor humans, out of that reasoning which differs man from the beasts of the field, came the whispered truth.

"I was not elect; yet was I nominate. Providence had saved me from the adder, from the bullet, from death by drowning and from the snares of Satan for some purpose. What that purpose is, I see only as in a glass, darkly, my masters, save that 'tis to serve the right as I hold right, and as opportunity appears, the doing rightly myself; also to right others and do battle against wrong!"

The colonels moved uneasily, but Cromwell stared from under drawn brows at this strange tinker-trooper-evangelist.

"And in the guardhouse," Bunyan went on, "where I stood watch over this unhappy youth and we did speak together, suddenly from this and that, things he said or did not say—aye, more than he did not say—a ray of the All-Seeing came to me and I knew the inwardness of this vexed matter, even as it had been clearly writ down on tablets and placed in my hands.

"And now—!"

He paused as if before some great climax. But he did not say at once that my warning against Slythey as a probable eavesdropper and his own memory of Slythey's spying upon the manor garden had suggested a possible explanation of my unauthorized absence. He did not even reveal then that the manor garden was the scene of his own encounter with "Richard

Eveleigh," or that he now knew that person to have been the king.

No! He broke off just as Ruth and Slythey began to show symptoms of an uneasiness I shared, if for different reasons. John Bunyan grabbed the maid by the wrist. To the amazement of all, even the stony Cromwell, he shouted in her face:

"Maid—*wilt thou wed me?*"

That was the most astounding time, place and manner of wedding proposal of which I have any knowledge, personally or by hearsay.

Ruth, as you and I have been aware for some time, was at least half in love with Hobgoblin Jack. And now, perhaps fearing that not to humor him might precipitate a revelation by John of his recently-acquired knowledge of who it was harbored the king, and where, and perhaps completely dominated for the moment by Bunyan's thunderous manner, the Puritan maid tremulously faltered:

"Y-yes, John."

At her answer even Cromwell sat back and came as near to downright laughing as I ever knew the man do.

Then, still holding the maid firmly by the wrist, and even giving it a little shake to keep her in mind of his masterfulness, Bunyan said:

"Very well! Under that affirmative, maid, th' art my betrothed wife—before witnesses—and within the hour the bond shall be confirmed by clergy.

"Very well!" he went on triumphantly. "Now, as thy husband, *I command thee, wife, to speak!*"

She was Puritan maid, brought up in the idea of unquestioning obedience to the accepted lord and master; but nevertheless she protested.

"Oh, John, I cannot! Thou knowest I cannot! Think of my dear mistress!"

"Then thou art no wife of mine!" cried Bunyan, who, having hardly a grain of humor in his whole body, was quite unaware of the absurdity of his attitude, which appealed most ludicrously to all present, except Ruth and John himself.

The maid, completely dominated by the idea of wifely obedience, never thought in that moment to remind Bunyan that she

was not yet his wife, and might never be if he proposed to continue lording her as he had begun.

"Very well, Mistress Yes-and-No," said Bunyan, releasing her hand as if he forever renounced her. "Then must I even do that which I had rather ye had done yourself. But an a wife be stubborn, a husband must even act on her behalf, whether it please or displease. Very well!"

And forthwith, speaking for his wife-elect, as keeper of her conscience, so to speak, Bunyan repeated the story which he had probably *shaken* out of her when he hunted her up at the manor after dashing out of the prison—not to sleep, but to serve me, as I now perceived.

He told all that he had not already related—of his encounter with Richard Eveleigh in the garden and his own stupidity in not seeing that he was the king until later, when he appeared in his majesty's dress. He described the whole scene—as Ruth had undoubtedly pictured it to him and as the maid had seen it from the hall door of the manor—between the king and me, with Joyce, Falconer, the maid and the mysterious intruder as minor characters in the drama.

Clearly it was made to appear that, no matter how foolhardy I had been and mistaken in my method of approach, I had been, in another sense, *more* than doing my duty when I was shot down by the mysterious unknown.

Now, throughout this recital, knowing the tragic climax to which it was leading, I had been keeping a sharp eye on Master Slythey.

At first he had been nervous. Then, when Ruth betrayed her fear of him, he had gained in self-confidence. Thereafter his whole air had been that of a man waiting to see how the wind blows. This wind-watching, so as ever to trim his sails accordingly, was, I now see, a leading trait in the man's character.

But his nervousness reappeared when Ruth's story—as repeated by Bunyan—came nearer to that shot. I could see he was terribly discomforted, that he eyed the door and would have tried to escape had not two of Okey's men been on guard there.

He was shaking like a jelly when Cromwell asked, not Bunyan, but Ruth directly:

"And who was this traitor in the dress of an Ironside who shot down Trooper Brooke on behalf of Charles Stuart? Maid, will ye answer me that question?"

"I can answer truly," said Ruth, "that I do not know. I saw not his face clearly—so suddenly he appeared from that other door—and the smoke from the pistol—and instantly the king did command me out, lest perhaps I did recognize the man and might speak of my knowledge afterward."

At this Slythey drew a deep, audible breath of relief. And by that I knew that *he* knew the identity of the "Roundhead" who had aided the king's escape. I began, also, to see that it was no wonder he had been able to inform in detail of the king's ride by Sibbertoft. But why had he not prevented it—informed Cromwell of the planned escape before it was too late to spoil the game?

I wondered if it was possible that Slythey himself had been double-dealing, running with the fox while he hunted with the hounds. But such a charge, unsustained, would hardly count against his denial. Ruth had not recognized the Roundhead, and apparently Mistress Joyce, for reasons of her own, had not shared with the maid her probable knowledge of the man, and his share in the planned escape. Then, too, Ruth had made no charge even implicating Slythey. The latter was not even under suspicion!

Cromwell sat in deep thought for a while. He took no counsel, asked not any opinion of the officers with him; which was exactly like the man.

His boring eyes moved from face to face, and finally settled on mine with a smile of—what was it?—amused pity?

I know now that his mind had arrived at the point where it was less concerned with passing fresh judgment upon me than in getting at the bottom of the escape of Charles, or, rather, the identity of those besides Mistress Eveleigh, who had aided that escape.

While I had done a foolish thing in not informing my officers of the king's whereabouts, Cromwell—who, of course, knew

nothing of my promise to Joyce—was apparently satisfied that I was at least no traitor or Royalist agent in Roundhead disguise.

Principally, I could see that he was keen to arrive at the identity of that person in Ironside armor who had shot me—and Falconer by mistake—when I tried to capture the king.

That man, still at large, was a menace to Cromwell's hope of seizing Charles and, by some drastic measure, bringing civil discord to an end. Also, the man was a traitor and undoubtedly a spy of the most contemptible kind.

As for the story Ruth and Bunyan had told, Cromwell clearly believed it, the more for the maid's reticence concerning that part which she herself had refused to tell. All that was now necessary to close the inquiry into my conduct and motives—and Bunyan's startling insubordination—was to establish the identity of the man who fired that shot, the same man, in all probability, who planned and effected the king's escape to the Welsh border by way of Sibbertoft.

"Where is this woman, Joyce Eveleigh?" he asked suddenly.

"She is here!" said Bunyan in quiet triumph, as if he had but impatiently awaited the question in order to play his great card in answer.

"Here?" Cromwell echoed, looking around the room. "Where?"

"She waits without," said the "great instrument." "Foreseeing need of her testifying, I did even apprehend the lady."

"Apprehend?" said Cromwell rather blankly.

"Even so I did, sir—aye, and paroled her likewise while I went to stop the hanging."

Again the ghost of a smile about old Noll's mouth, while the two colonels shook their heads amusedly, as if saying to themselves: "To what is our model army come!"

"Summon her!" said Cromwell briefly.

"I shall see to't at once, sir," said Master Slythey, moving toward the door with all possible speed.

"I did not address you," said the gen-

eral coldly. "Remain! Okey, fetch the woman!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

GALLOWS FRUIT.

SERGEANT OKEY presently opened the door from without, and himself stood aside at respectful salute. Mistress Joyce Eveleigh slowly entered the room.

She was again, as I recalled her that day in the garden when she walked to the summer-house at the king's summons, modestly moving in grace. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyelids drooped; but she carried her head high. There was that about her whole bearing of beauty and dignity which made Cromwell stare for a moment, then rise to his feet.

The two colonels had only awaited this example; and now behold the three of them standing up and involuntarily rendering tribute.

I was conscious of these things only as a corner of my eye caught them. My direct gaze was all upon her. She stopped in the middle of the room, almost at my elbow and directly in front of Cromwell.

Then her eyelids lifted. She returned the salute of Cromwell and his officers with a slight inclination of her head, then looked steadily—for just a moment or two—into my eyes. Upon Slythey, to the left of Ruth, she flashed an arrow of disdain, then turned to John Bunyan, as if she recognized him more than Cromwell, as temporarily director of her affairs. But Bunyan graciously waved a hand toward Oliver Cromwell.

"Mistress," said the general, "I would ask that ye be seated."

She declined the seat which Okey hustled from a corner. The two colonels looked to Cromwell for their cue. Would he resume his seat? He did not; possibly forgot to in the diversion of interest.

And so Oliver Cromwell, his officers, Mistress Joyce, and all of us were on our feet throughout the rest of that hearing.

"Mistress," said the general, clearly choosing his words, "is there aught ye

would say that may further the right cause of Parliament, and at the same time save this youth from the gibbet, which still awaits him?"

"The right cause?" said my lady with a little smile. "Mayhap, sir, we differ there, but argument would ill fall from a woman's lips in these times. And what I may say, even should it bring trial upon myself, I say merely that justice may not be ill-served."

"I shall honor the truce, and ha' mind of your thought," said Cromwell.

"Know then," she went on calmly, "that on several nights before the battle of Naseby the king and his staff did lodge at Eveleigh Manor. After the defeat, having mind of my father's loyalty—and mine, perhaps—the king, almost a fugitive, took thought of my house as a temporary refuge until his forces might be reordered."

She paused a moment, turning over in her mind, it seemed to me, the advisability of frankness in a matter which she would fain forget. The flush on her face deepened, and she bit her lip. I saw her gaze move for a single instant to Jonas Slythey, who stood there pale and moist with agitation. Suddenly her eyes widened and blazed.

"Before that, sir—between the king's first and second coming, this man," indicating Slythey as if she loathed naming him, "learning that I had harbored his majesty, did threaten me with exposure to the king's enemies, did I not"—she hesitated—"did I not foreswear my—my religious faith."

"Later, failing to move me to his purpose, as I walked in the village with Mistress Prynne I was set upon by a mob, led by this man, and accused of witchcraft."

Cromwell, his face dark as a storm-cloud, turned upon the trembling Slythey.

"By the mace!" he cried. "I ha' mind o' that before, and of this lad, Brooke, and the red-haired champion by the green. Ods! But is there no law in England that every Tom, Dick, and Harry administers justice to his own fancy?"

"Sir—your excellency!" stammered Slythey. "You do misjudge me, sir. Thou knowest my calling. I did so act only in my zeal—"

"Zeal!" interrupted Bunyan in a bell-cose voice. "*Zeal! Great Gog and Magog! Lust, ye painted hypocrite!*"

"Hear me, sir!" Bunyan cried, turning to Cromwell, who this time made no attempt to silence him. "I will tell thee of that which this lady's modesty cannot."

"Oh, Master Bunyan, I pray thee—no!" Mistress Joyce protested; but her plea was lost upon Hobgoblin Jack.

In the voice of a Nemesis he told of Slythey's record, much as he had rehearsed it that day by the duck-pond, describing the varying hues of that worthy's professional coat and how, particularly, he was expelled from the king's army in which he was an officer at Edgehill.

"Aye, sir! Turned out like the evil thing of gambling, drunkenness, rape—all such ungodliness. And mark this well, sir—I know these things of old, for he is of my own village of Elstow in Bedford, where 'twas common gossip—'twas this lady's father, Sir William Eveleigh, who was his accuser!"

"That have I found out since. And first, for vengeance, did this shedskin lizard persecute the orphaned daughter when he did find her alone and unprotected, and, second, later being smitten with her beauty—"

He suddenly took hold of Ruth's wrist again and pulled her forward into plainer view.

"Speak, girl!" he cried. "As thy husband, I command thee! Say that which thine own modesty said ye could 'reveal to no man,' but which my light makes clear to me as the written tablet!"

Poor Ruth. She tried to speak, to support her John, to spare her mistress, to save me, perhaps. But she could not in Puritan modesty bring herself to utter the words. Her face crimsoned, and she burst into hot tears.

"Very well!" cried John Zealous-for-Truth. "I will even put words to it myself! Know, then, sir, that Master Slythey, becoming enamored of this lady's beauty—the which I do not deny myself—hoped to terrorize her to his vile thought by the fear of death as a witch!"

"Aye, on the very green of Naseby, ere

this lad drew his sword in her service, she did spurn his last word, preferring death to the touch of his *slythey* hands!"

How much of all this matter, which Bunyan stated as ~~fact~~, was arrived at by reasoning, information, or mere intuition, I did not know at the time; but I have since learned that he had the right of it all.

There was silence; whether on the part of Cromwell because he failed to see how this was concerned with the king's escape, I did not know until he bowed to Mistress Joyce and said:

"I know not which to admire the more, madam—your loyalty or your purity."

"And I will put one to that!" I cried, forgetting my position for the moment. "The king himself—"

"Oh, I pray thee—no!" Joyce again pleaded, all crimson confusion. "I pray thee ha' mercy on a poor maid!"

"Be still!" boomed Cromwell, glaring at me. "That glib tongue o' thine ha' forgot the rope which may yet thicken it."

I subsided, a little ashamed of my mistaken zeal. I did not, on second thought, see how the matter of the king's infatuation could help the situation.

"But one question I have to ask ye, mistress," said Cromwell presently. "Who was the traitor Roundhead or Royalist agent in ironside dress, who entered that room, shot down this lad Brooke, and aided the king's escape?"

"Nothing, sir, should bring his name to my lips had he served his king with undivided interest. Even that he saved the king, for which common service I was bound to tolerate him, even that he had provided the means for that escape to Chester on the very night Master Brooke came to the manor, hath no weight with me now, for at the same time he was serving two masters that he might serve himself. He is traitor to both sides, and from each he hath taken his wage."

"His name, mistress?" said Cromwell coldly.

"That man," said Joyce, pointing a quivering forefinger at Master Jonas Slythey, who promptly fell on his knees, groveling at her feet and begging her to unsay the words.

It was a curious scene. To me, and to John Bunyan, who lifted his hands above his head and began to return thanks to Heaven, the revelation was not so much of a revelation after all. The fact had dawned upon me, at least, gradually.

But to Cromwell it came as a bolt of surprise. He had not suspected *this* depth of moral obliquity in his paid spy.

Yet he betrayed no sign of surprise, only surveying the groveling, driveling creature object which had now crawled from Mistress Joyce's feet to the table and was weeping and babbling around the latter's wooden legs.

When Cromwell again spoke it was quite casually to Sergeant Okey in the doorway.

"You will convey my respects to Colonel Morley," said he, "and say that the gallows parade will not reassemble. 'Tis not fit honest men should witness such dishonor.

"But stay!" he added as Okey, saluting, was about to go.

For a half-minute Cromwell stood there in frowning thought, his eyes full of grim irony, upon the gibbering creature clinging to the table legs.

"'Twere a pity," said he slowly, "yon fine Upas tree should bear no fruit. Take that thing away and let me not see it again."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BELLS!

WHEN Okey and his guard left the room, escorting Jonas Slythey to that gibbet which had been erected for me, I realized that it was just possible I myself was not to escape altogether unscathed.

Cromwell seemed to be weighing in his mind just what degree of punishment my foolhardy and unauthorized acts deserved. It was Mistress Joyce, I am sure, who tipped the scales of justice in my favor.

"Craving your excellency's patience," she said with a winning smile, "'tis but just I should tell you something further."

Cromwell nodded assent.

"This gentleman," she said, "Master Hallam Brooke, whose father, I am told, served and died for the Parliament's cause on the same field where my father fell on the king's side—Master Brooke would not have taken authority unto himself had I not won from him a promise that he would tell no man of what he had seen and heard in the manor garden.

"This, sir, was before he came to realize that the person he had thought my uncle was indeed the king. He might have broken that promise without loss of honor as a gentleman, but he sought rather to save me and his honor as a soldier at the same time by the course he took."

The general pondered the point for a few moments, then smiled in a remotely amused way, as a god might over the little problems of little people.

"I fear me," he said, "justice must be doubly blind when so fair a *Portia* pleads."

Then he scowled at me.

"Get thee gone, lad, to thy company," said he with a kindly gruffness. "I ha' need o' brave men, and oft it takes a fool to be the bravest.

"I say thou art a fool, boy, to ha' placed such value on a promise made without knowledge of the involving matter. But greater men ha' been no lesser fools when reason fell beauty-struck.

"Get thee gone to thy duty. And ye may thank, not me, but God and this fair lady—aye, and thy red-haired comrade, who stands reprimanded—that ye do not now dangle, stark-eyed and tongue-tied, on a rope!"

That night Cromwell's division of the Parliamentary army marched southwest to join Lord Fairfax in the subjugation of such counties as were yet loyal—nominaly, at least—to Charles.

It is now common knowledge of how our arms triumphed, scattering the Royalist forces throughout that peninsula extending to Land's End. And in the rout of Goring's forces at Langport in Somerset I had the pleasure of knowing that my father's house was again mine own and that my Lord Fairfax and his staff were quartered there for a time.

Swiftly Charles's forces were beaten in their attempt to relieve Chester. Two months after Naseby, the Royalist cause again suffered defeat at Philiphaugh, while Cromwell in the south took Basing House and captured the great mainstay of the Royalists, the Marquis of Winchester.

In the following spring, to make short of that history which does not affect the rest of this chronicle, the last Royalist rout occurred at Stowe, and in April the king, himself driven from his stronghold at Oxford, was again a fugitive. He finally gave himself up at Newark to the Scots, who, in January of the following year, yielded him over to Parliament.

His trial and execution at London are matters which I do not care to dwell upon.

But before these final scenes in that fratricidal war John Bunyan and I (with many others not of the permanent army) were mustered out. And at once we made all haste, a pair of hopeful and eager lovers, to Naseby.

We had seen neither Mistress Joyce nor Ruth Prynne since that day of our dismissal from Cromwell's presence. We had not even had the privilege of a word with them, for it behooved us both to attend strictly to our duties in the hours following Cromwell's mood of clemency.

But now we came once more to Eveleigh Manor and presented ourselves at the kitchen door, playing again that we were tinker and apprentice in search of employ.

Of that meeting I shall say little, save that while John and Ruth sat together at the kitchen door I walked with Mistress Joyce in the garden.

For, mark ye, I was come again to her, not this time as a trooper of the opposite side, but as a landed gentleman of that England which was presently to be at peace.

And in the church at Naseby, John Bunyan and his angel were wedded. That is what I was coming to in this conclusion, and for a particular reason.

As I see it now, looking backward, that Puritan maid (with her little books) was truly the instrument of John's finding him-

self. And through all the years of their wedded life, through happiness and sorrow, union and separation, she continued to keep his flame of inspiration aglow.

There were tears in my eyes when I saw these two kneeling while the minister spoke the binding words—the great, shaggy John, his face wet and radiant, full of gratitude to God for the gift of this little Puritan maid whose hand nestled in his.

And there were tears, too, in the eyes of the lady who, as bridesmaid, knelt beside me, the groomsman. I looked at sweet Joyce through my own happy, blurred eyes, and I think she was conscious of my gaze and that somehow her hand was clasped in mine.

In that moment, though I had not yet dared utter the great words which were to surge from my heart at a later time, it was as if the benediction was upon us, too.

After the knot was tied Mistress Joyce kissed the bride, and so did I, and—I came very near to kissing the maid of honor, too. But I got no further than her slender white hand, for I was still afraid to be overbold.

And then we discovered, to the dismay of Dame Bunyan, that John had disappeared. Great was Ruth's distress, and Joyce appealed to me for an explanation of the groom's disappearance at *such* a time.

I was at a loss myself, until over our heads burst out a crash of bells!

"I know!" laughing I cried; and forthwith both the maids were deserted, and I rushed to the spiral stairway leading to the bell-tower.

As I climbed it the brazen tongues suddenly ceased their joyous chorus. At the entrance to the bell-chamber I stopped, and at the picture before my eyes I bowed my head in respect.

There was John Bunyan—no longer the harum-scarum, red-haired trooper of the camps—John Bunyan, the man he was fast becoming, on his knees in that dim place under the still swaying bells.

He was praying. His eyes were shut tight in that old childlike fashion. His rugged face was uplifted and strangely soft—and wet with honest tears.

"I was a poor pilgrim, floundering in the quagmire." So he prayed. "And then I saw an angel walking by my side, a candle of grace in her hand. And lo, to the right road she guided me, and along that we shall travel hand in hand a while.

"Yet, O Lord, the pilgrimage is but begun. Give me strength to keep on and be worthy of Thy great condescending. Amen!"

He was still kneeling, but now in a silence silvered by the twittering of birds in the bell-tower, when I tiptoed down the spiral stairway.

This chronicle, of an almost unknown period in the life of my friend, I have written at a much later time which is comparatively undisturbed by political and religious differences.

It was Mistress Joyce who bade me do it, she feeling that if I set down this chapter concerning that period of John's "wrestling" with his devil, it might bring those in high authority to a better understanding of the man and help win his release from that prison in which he has now spent many years.

At any time he could have brought about his release himself, but being no "Painted Hypocrite," or "Shedskin Lizard," he would not agree to preach God's Word in any other way than as he interpreted it himself; for through all his life he has been the same hard-headed, opinionated John, suffering for his own reasoned convictions and recognizing no supreme authority other than the Most High God.

And of late, to while away the tedium of jail, he, too, has written a book which he calls "Pilgrim's Progress." It is indeed the story of himself and his great burden. Joyce and I, frequently visiting Bedford jail, have been privileged to hear parts of it read to us.

We have both urged him to print it, against the opinion of others of his many friends, who fear he may involve himself in greater troubles if he does.

But the only opinion John Bunyan sets any store by is his own, once he has reasoned that it is right. Last time we visited him he had made a rhyme for the front part

of his book. Part of that rime I might well place at the end of my own, for the consideration of my son John, who may decide for himself, as his namesake has done, whether or not he shall print this less valuable record.

Some said, "John; print it"; others said, "Not so";

Some said it might do good; others said no. At last I thought, since you are thus divided, I print it will, and so the case decided.

POSTSCRIPT.

May 8, 1672.—Five years later, to the pages of this writing, I must add a note.

(The end.)

Joyce has rushed to me with the great tidings that John Bunyan has been released from Bedford Jail!

As soon as he hath greeted his sweet wife and children, his message says, he will come to Brooke Manor and spend some time fishing with me in Manor Brook.

"But I will not have the fishing upon a Sunday," he writes, "for on that day, which is the Lord's, I would even preach to thy tenants."

And so he shall when he comes, his pulpit a mossy rock, his church the green-wood.



WHEN I give up a job umpirin' in the Coast League to manage a semipro ball club in Oregon I thought I was exchangin' sackcloth and ashes for a couch in paradise. That's where I got caught a mile off the sack.

Callin' 'em when they're over and nearly over is custard compared to runnin' one of these almost professional outfits. An indicator yodler only has to stand for a lot of jawin' and cussin' and dodge a bottle or a brick now and then; but the pilot of a half-amateur club—jumpin' purgatory! He gets the unleavened arsenic.

The whole world figures they have as much right to ride you as a jitney bus. The ball-players growl and grumble, the backer of the club throws a fit accompanied

by acute convulsions every time he blows two bits, the fans pick you for the original fall guy, and probably the town marshal wonders if he oughtn't toss you in the local hoosegow while he digs up your horrible past.

Each time you lose a game you lose your job. Then, as you're leavin' the burg, broke, they relent and take you back for further punishment.

Down in Ashcave, Oregon, I was hired to superintend the baseball attempts of the Ferry Flour Mills talent, and it wasn't more 'n a week or two before my few remainin' hairs began to fall out. A victory was as much as a dozen right orbs to those millers, and in case of defeat I was the good old angora.

Not that I had such a rotten team. I possessed two good pitchers, a peppery backstop, and some fair fielders. There wasn't a real hard hitter in the line-up, however, and all my efforts to corral a barricade-buster were as fruitless as cherry-trees in December. It made me scratch my knob until my fingers were full of slivers.

I was in the wreck of an office the company kindly donated me at the plant one beautiful Monday mornin' tryin' to get over the disaster of the Sunday before. We had lost everythin' from the game to two new balls and a pair of spiked shoes, and I was in a swell humor for a murder, with a little dash of mayhem on the side.

Suddenly my door pops open, and a pretty muscular yokel pops in. He slams the door shut, takes a quick look around the hovel, and then gargles at me:

"Are you alone?"

"Not now," I come back. "Especially since you came in. What's on your chest?"

"My shirt, of course," says he. "I'm as comical as you are, brother. But I'm not here to bandy words. I have somethin' I want to lay before you."

"You may continue," I remark.

"Well, then, can you find a place for a .400 hitter on your ball team?"

"Not a place," I corrected. "Nine places."

"Good! Shoves out a contract. I'll sign on the dotted line now."

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute! Hold your fiery steeds! How do I know whether you can hit your weight in cream puffs?"

"Ah, that's it. You don't know. But I'll show you, brother. I'm the genuine shower from showville. Give me a look!"

"You're awful fresh, cutie," I tell him, "but I'm as hard up for stickers as Austria is for ice-cream, and I'd give any guy a chance, even if he had learned to bat in a correspondence-school. Have you a name, and, if so, what is it?"

"I belong to the well and favorably known Smith family. Leander Lucas Smith is the name. When do you want to sample a bit of my prowess?"

"Come around this afternoon—no, make it to-morrow. My sterlin' athletes will be

practisin' around three o'clock. We'll see what you can do."

"I'll say you will," says Leander Lucas, and bids me good mornin'.

He acted like a kinda nut, but he was a husky fish, and certainly would be as useful as a diamond in an engagement ring if he could clout the old agate for base knocks. I had a hope he would come through.

Leander wandered onto the grounds back of the plant the next afternoon while the boys was chasin' flies and trappin' grass-cutters, and gave the talent a few glances. He wore no uniform nor baseball shoes, but had a tattered baseball cap perched on his raven locks.

"Think you can go and smack a couple?" I ask.

"All I request is a chance and a cue," Leander replies.

I called over Andy Swanson, my big righthander, and catcher Joe Strong, and told them that a new recruit was goin' to try his luck with the ash. Andy grinned. He has a great fast ball, with as much hop as any heaver's I lamped in the Coast League. He has scared more than one amateur batter half to death with his smoke.

"You hit right-handed?" he says to Leander Lucas.

"No, I bat left-handed."

"Like Babe Ruth," chirps Joe Strong.

"Oh, no!" Andy shakes his head. "He may bat left-handed, but not like Babe Ruth. That's different."

"Don't lose any sleep over it, Mr. Pitcher," snaps Smith. "All you have to do is get out on that hill, throw one, and duck your head."

A couple of the boys snickered, and Andy got sore as a cut lip. He marched out to the slab with his teeth set, and I rather pitied Leander Lucas.

That young man calmly selected a willow, hefted it, and then dropped it. Pullin' a case from his pocket, he opened it and drew out a pair of glasses, which he proceeded to hang in front of his eyes. They were the funniest glasses I ever saw in my life—quite thick, and of an odd, pink shade.

"Your eyes weak?" I gargle. "This club ain't no place for blind men!"

"You didn't find me playin' no violin outa tune on a street corner, did you?" barks Leander. "Wait and see how blind I am."

"If we take on this bird," says Carl Miller, the first baseman, who figures to be sarcastic, "we'd better find a few fellows on crutches and sign them, too."

"Yes," I tell him. "We'll put one on first base, if we do."

Leander had advanced to the plate, and was standin' up there like a real clouter, pink glasses or no pink glasses. Andy took a big windup and let go his fast one.

"Look out it don't hit you!" he hollers.

Leander Lucas Smith took a man-sized cut at that streak of speed and—

Boy!

I'll swear I never saw a ball hit harder in my life. The pill went clear over a row of freight-cars in right field, and I'll bet our mouths were as wide open as gamblin' in Tia Juana. Andy Swanson couldn't believe it himself.

After Leander had clicked a dozen or two drives, and Fred Miske, my southpaw, had received as rough maulin' as Andy, I stopped the slaughter. The fielders had their tongues hangin' out from shaggin long-distance blows.

"You'll do!" I announce. "What do you play—infield or outfield?"

"I roam the gardens," says Leander. "Bring on your contract, brother. How much lettuce do I get to add my irresistible sluggin' to this crew of wheat-grinders?"

I haggled a while over terms, but finally landed him on the pay-roll.

"We play only Saturday and Sunday afternoons," I says to him. "The rest of the week you work in the plant and practise."

"All the work I'll do you can put in the eye of a needle and still be able to thread it," he chirps. "I'm a ball-player, I am."

"You listen like it," I confess. "This week we entertain a ship-yard team from Portland for three contests—one Saturday matinee, and a double bill Sunday."

"Bring 'em on."

"Tell me one thing," I entreat. "Why do you wear those funny pink glasses? Do you need 'em?"

"Do I need them! Does a fish need scales? Does rhubarb pie need rhubarb? Does coffee require cream? I'll say I need 'em!"

"Why?"

"Don't be an old woman," rebukes Leander severely. "Curiosity killed a cat. You'd hate to be a cat, wouldn't you?"

I quit, and let our newest recruit keep his pink-hued secret for the time bein'.

On Saturday afternoon I inserted him into the line-up against our ship-yard visitors, puttin' him in the clean-up position. Most of the ship men were old leaguers, and right off the bat they began to razz Leander Lucas.

"Where did you get Pinky, Mac?" they ask me, but I just grin.

The first time Leander came to bat, "Suds" Southey, who was hurlin' for the opposition, affected great astonishment.

"Hello, Goggles!" he calls out. "Think you'll need four eyes to see the apple to-day?"

"If a one-eyed man couldn't bust your curves he oughta hang his head in shame," Leander sneers. "I can hear the glass rattlin' around your elbow every time you throw. Let me look at one, you old has-been!"

"See what you can do with this, you fresh rube!" snarls Suds, burnin' one his direction.

No, Leander didn't do nothin' to that one. Just slapped it up against the fence for three cushions.

"You are goin' to be a great help to my battin' average," he squawks from third base. "I oughta hit 1,000 to-day."

What's more, he did. Four times he leaned against the marble for three-baggers, and the fans were ravin' wild over that boy. Pink glasses or not, he was a sweet hitter.

Not only did we wallop the ship-yarders that afternoon, but we handed them a twin lickin' Sunday. Leander Lucas Smith was on the job every minute. He played nice ball in the outfield, and in fourteen excursions to the pan rapped out ten solid knocks. He seemed to have a failin' for triples, and Carl Miller began to call Leander the "guy who swats the pink three-baggers."

For the next month Leander was the loud

noise on the mill team. He was a demon with the cue, and never went hitless in a single game we played. Instead of battin' around .400, I think he was crackin' them about twice that much.

Nobody knew why he always wore them pink glasses, and I heard more theories advanced than there was arguments against the league of nations. Leander never told any one.

Off the field he wasn't a chatty chap, and once in a while would indulge in funny moods. As long as he wrecked the fences we didn't care, however.

Then, one Sunday, Leander showed up for a game at Astoria minus his pink goggles. He was pale as a sheet and sputterin' naughty words.

"I lost 'em! I lost 'em!" he wails. "I won't be able to hit a flock of bungalows this afternoon!"

"Forget it!" I says, tryin' to be cheerin'. "You'll hit even better with those pink blinders gone. I don't see why you ever wore them, anyhow."

"If brains was water you'd die of thirst!" he shoots my way. "I might as well be without a bat as without those glasses."

He was right. The only reason he didn't fan out five times in a row that day was because he wasn't up to bat but four times. He just seemed to be up there wavin' at the pill as it flitted by, and we weren't up against any Alexander, either.

That evenin' we hunted all over an Astoria hotel for Leander's pink glasses. We understood now that he needed them, all right. Why he had to have 'em was as big a puzzle as the high cost a livin', but that didn't make no difference.

One of the maids at the hostelry finally dug them up, unharmed, and I thought Leander was goin' to marry her, he was so grateful. He had that girl dizzy. I'll bet he kissed her a hundred times before she could get loose.

After that Leander Lucas Smith always had his glasses. We never gave him a chance to mislay them, and those queer, pink lenses were guarded as if they were pure gold and diamonds. No reason they shouldn't be, the way Leander hit when he had 'em on.

10 A

The summer rolled along, and the Ferry Flour Mills team got the rep of bein' the best semipro array in Oregon, which is not shy of fast clubs. Finally, at the end of the season, a challenge was issued us by the Redlight Rubber Company, which boasted the champion team of California, and a game was arranged in San Francisco. With Leander and his pink glasses we had a good chance of coppin', I figured.

It made a nice trip from Ashcave to San Francisco, and quite a few of the more violent bugs come along to see the casualties. I took a dozen players besides myself, and one of the main cheeses at the mill locked up his desk and jazzed down with us.

Only one game was to be played, and it was scheduled for Saturday afternoon. The San Francisco Seals were on the road, so we managed to get the Coast League Park for the big battle, and all the advertisin' we got in the newspapers helped pull a big crowd for us.

The rubber team was undoubtedly fast, and they had the rep of bein' fightin' fools from the words "play ball!" Likewise, they had a pitcher who was said to crochet some of the flossiest benders in the clinic—an ex-American Leaguer named Bartley.

Both Fred Miske and Andy Swanson begged me to start the combat, and they spoiled most of my meals the day before the game. I finally decided on Andy. He had the advantage of experience, and I believed his fast ball would keep the Redlight guys backin' away from the pan.

San Francisco turned out in great style to see us clash, and I could see the size of the crowd was makin' some of the bunch a little nervous. Not Leander Lucas Smith, though. He strolled around with his pink glasses, payin' no attention to the wit and humor wished on him from all sides.

"Old Pink just lets 'em squawk," says Joe Strong. "That's the way. Don't let those yokels worry you."

"Met a fellow on Market Street last night who was askin' me some questions about Smith," says Rudy Kizer. "A big, husky guy. Seemed mighty interested in him and his pink specs."

"Mebbe it was a gambler," utters Carl Miller.

"Don't get your burr filled up with funny ideas," I snap. "We're here to play ball and beat these rubbernecks. How's the old wing, Andy?"

"Pretty good," Swanson grins confidently.

Ferry Flour Mills was first to bat when the umpire called the game. Benny Means, our lead-off man, picked out a thin black club.

"Get on, Benny," I says. "Any old thing to reach first."

Heaver Bartley, of the Redlight Rubber, had conflictin' ideas, however. He forced Benny to miss three and then come back for a drink. Little Lister, our shortstop, and fast as a streak, next poked a weak grounder down third base and reached first on a fumble.

The rubberites chattered away at a great rate to cheer Mr. Bartley, but Lister promptly purloined second on the first ball. Bad baseball it was, at that; but he got away with it.

"Sap one, Tommy!" I implore Dwyer, who was at the plate. He was one of the surest hitters on the team.

Tommy tried hard, but this Bartley was no clown. He had speed, hooks, and a wonderful change of pace. By puttin' stuff on every heave he set Dwyer down on strikes. Two in the grave, and a runner on second.

Leander Lucas Smith adjusted his pink glasses, plucked out a weighty bludgeon, and carelessly ambled up to the obloid.

"Here goes your old ball game!" Carl Miller bellows from the third base coachin'-line.

"Back, you fielders!" shouts Eddie Kizer from first.

The rubber team let go a continual round of remarks as Leander dug his spikes into the dirt.

"Take off those specs!"

"You'll never see the ball, anyhow!"

"Get a telescope!"

"Hound him outa there! Hound him outa there!"

"Be careful you don't break his glasses, Bart!"

"Razzberry for you, Goggles! Think you're at the opera?"

The first strike was called on Leander. It looked low, but umpires will make mistakes. I oughta know.

After passin' up two wide ones Leander swung and missed a curve, and the outcry started again:

"You got his number, Bart!"

"This bird is easy! Get him outa there!"

"He can't see 'em! The glasses are his alibi!"

Bartley buzzed over a fast one, and Leander cut it on the seam, drivin' it square into the hands of the second baseman. I'll bet his lunch-hooks burned the remainder of the afternoon, but he hung onto the cherry. Three out.

The Redlights romped in, full of jazz and ginger, but Andy Swanson wasn't feelin' like Santa Claus, and they got no presents from him.

Up until the first of the sixth both pitchers were as stingy with blows as Caledonians, and the score-board was blank. Bartley was twirlin' a beautiful game, but he had nothin' on Andy Swanson. The latter's smoke was blindin' the rubbernecks.

Joe Strong pushed a single into left to open Canto Six. Swanson helped himself to three nice swings and then handed his wand to the bat-boy. Benny Means dropped a bunt in front of the platter and beat it out. Lister let a fast one tickle a button on his blouse, and the bags were crammed.

"Here's where we do it!" I yell. "One out, Tommy! Smear it!"

Eddie Kizer and Carl Miller were dancin' on the coachin'-lines, the crowd was roarin', and the Redlight team was darn nervous. Tommy Dwyer marched to the plate with his jaw out, and faced Bartley.

The rubber pitcher refused to get fussed. He was as cool as a vanilla frappe, and struck Tommy out. Two buried, and Leander Lucas Smith next on the list.

It was the third appearance at the plate for Leander, and so far he had rapped out no knocks. His second time up had seen him fly out to deep right.

The whiffin' of Dwyer had heartened the rubbernecks a bit and they tried to razz Smith about his glasses. Leander said never

a word—he wasn't squawkin' much this game. He just laid back and smacked the first one Bartley pitched on the old pick.

It was a terrible bam to center, and by the time the apple was relayed in, three runners had counted, and Leander was leggin' it to third.

He made the hassock by a great slide, but somehow his pink glasses flew off to one side. The shortstop, dashin' up to assist in the play, stepped right on them.

When Leander saw what had happened he went cuckoo. He dove off the bag and pasted the shortstop on the chin, knockin' him cold. He also socked Carl Miller, who run in to grab him. He was ravin' wild, and we had to fight to subdue him.

"My glasses! My glasses!" he sobs. "They're busted! I can't play any more! I never can play any more! I'm through! I'm through!"

He was sure nutty, and I had to take him outa the game. The umpire insisted on it, anyhow.

We calmed him a bit, and then I had Frank Sails, the mill scorekeeper, escort him down to the hotel where we was all stoppin'. Leander was cryin' and moanin', and I never saw a guy look so miserable in all my life.

Eddie Kizer took his place on third, and stayed there while his brother Rudy fanned. The innin' was over, with the score 3 to 0 in our favor.

With Leander Lucas Smith and his pink glasses outa the line-up, things didn't look the same. The boys were all upset, and I couldn't put jazz into them.

Andy Swanson grew wild in the last of the sixth, and then Eddie Kizer misjudged a long fly. Before that fatal session was over the Redlight Rubber nine had scored five runs, and I felt in my bones we'd never get 'em back.

I was right. Bartley had us on his hip the rest of the way, and though Andy Swanson braced up in the final frames, the damage was done. Ferry Flour Mills went down to defeat by a 5 to 3 score.

We drifted into the hotel after the contest lookin' like a crew of indigo merchants, cussin' everythin' from the luck to Leander's pink glasses.

Joe Strong and I went right to Smith's room, and found him starin' moodily at the dresser.

"Well, we lost the game," I says, sourly.

"Of all the lucky stiffs!" Joe growls.

"We had 'em beaten, and then they got all the breaks! Andy only had one bad innin', you know!"

"One was plenty," I remark.

"You certainly hit that bird who broke your glasses a jolt, Smith," Joe continues. "Oh, man!"

"I should have killed him!" busts out Leander. "Those were the most wonderful glasses in the world! There never will be another pair like them!"

"What was it about them that made them so remarkable?" I ask. "It's no use keepin' it a secret now, is there?"

"No, I suppose not," he says. "They were the invention of a near and dear friend who thought they'd help me become a great batter. So they did."

"How?" Joe and I chorus.

"Did you ever see those movin' pictures that are taken by what they call a slow camera? That make all the movements seem slow and terrible languid, like in boxin' or wrestlin'?"

"Well, this inventor manufactured a pair of glasses from a series of lenses so constructed that when you peeped through them they slowed up movements similar to that camera. He used some kinda pink glass—I don't know why. One of his secrets, I guess.

"You can see what these glasses would do for a batter. When I put them on, no matter how fast a pitcher threw a ball, or how much curve he put on it, I could tell just what was comin' and lay back for it. No wonder I hit 1,000 game after game.

"Those glasses did it for me. And that big-footed horse had to step on them and break them! Not another pair in the world like them, and the inventor dead! Oh, it drives me wild!"

He leaped to his feet and started tearin' around the room, while Joe and I tried to inhale the astonishin' information he had spilled.

While Leander was grievin' in loud tones over his awful loss, a rap came at the door,

and then a stranger entered. A big, husky fellow, who might have been the man Rudy Kizer had met on Market Street. It later turned out he was.

"What's the matter with you, Donlin?" he says sharply to Leander Lucas.

The latter stopped, and stared at the newcomer a coupla seconds. Then he says, with a timid smile:

"Oh, hello, Charlie! I—oh, hello!"

"Been away from home quite a long time now, Donlin," says Charlie. "I sure have had my work findin' you. Ready to go back now?"

"This is Leander Lucas Smith," I butt in. "Who were you lookin' for?"

"Leander Lucas nothin'! I know who I'm lookin' for, friend. And he knows, too. Don't you, Donlin?"

"Yes, Charlie," comes submissively.

"What's the big idea, anyhow?" I gargle.

"This guy is a nut, that's all. Escaped from the State insane asylum in Illinois a few months ago, after layin' out a guard or two. He's crazy!"

"Crazy?" Joe and I are all in a heap.

"I should say he is. But he's cunnin'. For weeks he'll be as rational as they make 'em, and then he'll suddenly go bugs. How long have you known him?"

"Why, he's been playin' ball for a semi-pro club I manage," I utter. "The best hitter I ever saw—as long as he wore pink glasses."

"Yeh, I saw him to-day. He went nuts when those glasses were busted. I suppose he told you they helped him in his battin', didn't he?"

"He said they were patterned after the slow camera, and—"

"Ha-ha!" laughs Charlie. "He's got a great imagination when he cuts loose, haven't you, Donlin? I remember those glasses when he was with the patients' team at the asylum. Told them you got them from an inventor, didn't you?"

"Yes, Charlie."

"I don't know where he did get 'em," Charlie explains, "but it's all bunk about slow cameras and all that stuff. They were nothin' but colored glass."

"But—he hit like a demon," I says. "It has been remarkable the way he's batted

this season. And he said it was the glasses that did it. I know one time he mislaid them and couldn't hit a barn."

"Oh, he can hit as well without glasses as with 'em, but I suppose the psychology of the thing is that he had invested the specs with wonderful powers and kidded himself into thinkin' he couldn't hit unless he wore them."

"He sure kidded himself into a swell battin' average then," comments Joe Strong.

Charlie, the guard, stared at us.

"I guess you guys don't know who this bird really is?" he says.

We did not, and admitted the same.

"Well, this is Donlin—the famous Ping Donlin, who hit around .350 in the big league for two seasons. He went bugs from consumin' liquid refreshments and was sent to the asylum.

"Hit? Say, the sport writers used to write books about his mighty swattin'!"

"I do remember somethin' about it now," Joe puts in. "About three years ago he lost his mind, wasn't it?"

"Yes, I think it was. No wonder he could hit like a world-beater playin' semi-pro baseball. It wasn't really the pink glasses that had anythin' to do with it except probably give him confidence. The natural ability is there. A bird who hits .350 in the big time—say, what oughtn't he do out in the sagebrush?"

"I want my glasses, Charlie," suddenly erupts Ping Donlin, alias Leander Lucas Smith. "Find my glasses, Charlie!"

"All right, Ping—I know where they are. We'll go and get 'em right away," says the guard. "Good-by, gents. Sorry to rob your team of its star slugger, but they're hankerin' for him back in Illinois.

"He won't be much good until he finds some new glasses or somethin', anyhow. Let's go, Donlin!"

That was the last anybody connected with the Ferry Mills flourmakers ever saw of our wonderful hitter, but many's the time since then I've wished I had a coupla guys wearin' pink glasses on the club, goofy or not.

However, if wishes were base knocks my whole squad would be hittin' .450, anyhow, so what's the use?

Moors End

by Jeannette I. Helm

Author of "The House of the Purple Stairs," etc.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BEHIND THE LOCKED DOOR.

STILL thinking that it was only part of my dream, I pulled myself together with a great effort, and getting up from my chair, walked around the room several times.

There must have been something decidedly unpleasant in that whisky, for my feet still felt leaden and my head dazed. I pushed up the window, and leaning out, breathed in the fresh cool air until my head felt clearer. It was strange, though, how the idea of the tapping persisted: I could almost imagine I heard it still.

I drew in my head and listened: it really was there, although somewhat fainter and at longer intervals. By listening intently, I could make out that it came from the opposite side of the room, just back of the book-shelf half-way between the fireplace and the closet door. I pulled aside the shelf, and examined the wall carefully, but it was unbroken at this place, with no signs of any pipes whose leaking might perhaps cause the noise.

It was very puzzling, and I couldn't imagine how it was made, or by what; but there was a persistence in the taps, feeble though they were getting to be, that made me sure that there was some purpose behind them.

Could it be some machine that was making the noise, or some one trying to communicate with me? A wild idea flashed through my head; suppose Shirley's father had hidden himself in there, and imagining that he was next to her room, was trying

to attract her attention! He might be injured in some way, and be unable to get out.

With this idea in mind, I bent down and tapped several times on the wall; the effect was magical: a perfect storm of taps came back, and then everything was quiet. I didn't know what to make of it, a human being would have gone on answering me; could it be rats, after all, and the last noise be made by their alarmed feet as they scurried away? This was more than probable, but I made up my mind to find out, and with my brain thoroughly awake now, set about the task.

My great-uncle's room was at the corner of the house, but I had noticed before that the room did not extend completely to the end, the remaining space being occupied, I imagined, by a large closet or a dressing-room. As there was no other door in the room, except that by which one entered, and the door in front of which the dresser had been moved, this last must be the only way to get in.

I seized the dresser and pulled it out of the way. As I did so, the door opened and Shirley looked in.

"I heard the noise and wondered if uncle had returned. What are you doing?" she said a trifle suspiciously.

"I heard a tapping on the wall there, and I'm trying to get in to see what it is."

"Would Uncle Gregory like it?" she began, but I interrupted viciously.

"Hang Uncle Gregory! He's left us here to our own devices, and I'm going to find out what's up."

I thought she paled a little.

This story began in the *All-Story Weekly* for July 10.

"Do you think there is some one in there?"

"I don't know, but I'm going to see, unless, as is most likely, the door is locked."

I rattled the knob angrily, as I spoke, for I had just discovered this last to be true.

"Perhaps it's bolted from inside," suggested Shirley.

"In that case, there must be some one inside; perhaps we can induce him to open it himself."

I knocked vigorously on the door several times, but there was no response nor any renewal of the tapping. I opened the large blade of my knife and inserted it in the door jamb.

"What are you going to do—pry the door open?"

"No, only see whether it is bolted. Ah, I thought not. Then we must find the key."

"Perhaps you have another duplicate on your key-ring," said Shirley hastily.

"You're rather good at finding keys yourself," I retorted. "You found the key to our guests' room very quickly, if I remember."

Shirley disdained reply, and I turned again to the door. An ex-burglar, who I had chummed with during my cub days, had once showed me a rather neat way of cutting out the lock of a door. It required a cold chisel and a hammer, however, so I went in search of Peter. He was peacefully peeling potatoes, and was considerably surprised to see me.

"You must be a quick rower, Mr. Brent, to get back so soon. It took me fully an hour just to row up here; but then you are a deal younger and stronger than me. Did you bring the doctor with you?"

"I haven't been to the village," I confessed. "I fell asleep in my uncle's room, and when I woke, I thought I heard some one tapping in the next room. I tried to get in but the door was locked. Do you happen to know if there is an extra key around?"

Peter's jaw dropped as he stared at me. My dream had been so vivid, and his share in it so important, that I couldn't help smil-

ing to myself at the contrast between it and his present every-day occupation.

"Some one tapping, sir! Why, that's Mr. Gregory's dressing-room, and not a soul goes there except himself. There can't be anybody in there, sir. You must have dreamed you heard a noise."

I was beginning to think I had myself, but something urged me on to investigate.

"I'll just take a look to be sure. Have you got a key?"

"No, sir. Mr. Deane always kept the key himself."

"We'll have to force it, then. Have you got a cold-chisel and a hammer?"

"I think so, sir, but had we better do it? Mr. Deane may be back any minute—and he's sure not to like it."

"I'll take the responsibility. Hurry up and get the tools."

Peter went off, still doubtfully, and soon returned with just what I wanted. We went up-stairs, and I found Shirley with her ear pressed close to the door. She turned an excited face to me.

"There's some one or something in that room! I distinctly heard a moan just now."

I was convinced by her manner that she had nothing to do with this.

"We'll soon see," I replied, and briskly went to work. The job was a harder one than I had thought it would be, and it was some time before the lock fell into my hand.

I laid the tool aside and pulled gently on the door. It stuck, and I was afraid there might be a bolt after all, but a couple of good wrenches opened it at last.

We all crowded forward, Peter, as excited as any of us, crumpling his apron which he had forgotten to take off, nervously between his hands. For several seconds, I could make out nothing in the half-light that came in through closed shutters and drawn blinds. Then I saw dimly a small rectangular room with a built-in bath and lavatory, at one side, and a table in the center, and long narrow divan that was close to the wall of my uncle's room.

It was to this last our eyes flew, and I confess my heart gave an extra throb when I saw the dim outline of a heap upon it. I could feel Shirley's arm trembling against mine, and Peter was gulping hard.

"For God's sake, what is it?" he gasped.
 "I—I can't see."

"Open the shutter," I said in as matter-of-fact tone as I could, "then we will see. It's probably a heap of old clothes."

But in my heart I knew better; and when Peter's shaking hands had thrust back the shutters, I saw what I expected and dreaded to see; the body of a man lying on the couch. Peter gave a gasping sound, and Shirley clutched my arm.

"Oh, who is it?" she cried. "Has he killed him?"

I knew then what she expected to see; The body was covered with a long tablecloth which hid the features, but I felt sure that those features were not strange to Shirley.

Had Uncle Gregory murdered his brother in a moment of desperation, and was this the reason why he hadn't returned?

No matter now, the first thing to do was to find out if the man was yet alive, for there was an immobility about the still form that hinted at dreadful things. I crossed over quickly to the couch and drew down the covers. The man was lying on his back, and then I saw the reason for the stillness; he was gagged and bound so tightly to the couch, with such numerous layers of cord, that he could not possibly move.

Only the eyes were alive, and they looked up into mine with such despairing, yet defiant, appeal that I felt my heart touched. The man lying before me, in spite of a terrible emaciation and pallor was almost the double of Uncle Gregory in features and general shape of the head.

There was no doubt of it; this must be the wicked nephew, Shirley's father—he was nearly as old as his uncle—but how did he happen to be bound this way and so evidently half starved?

All these thoughts passed like lightning through my mind, Peter gave a cry and rushing forward dropped on his knees by the couch, began to unfasten the cords with trembling fingers.

"Good God! who has done this?" he moaned.

"Peter, this must be Mr. Dean's nephew," I said, my brain a whirl of

doubts and conjectures. But Peter seemed not to hear me. He had cut the cords that bound the gag, and I was shocked to see the blackened swollen lips. The man on the couch tried to speak, but could not do more than moan.

Shirley, who seemed as dazed as I, ran to fetch a glass of water which she held to his lips; Peter, meantime ceaselessly rubbing the shrunken limbs—muttering incoherently to himself. The man closed his eyes and I thought he was gone, for the pulse showed only a flicker; there was a glass decanter, of what smelled like sherry, on a table and I gave him a spoonful.

It seemed to revive him, for he opened his eyes again and tried to speak. I bent down close to hear the hoarse murmur.

"Are you Carlos Brent? Where is he?"

"Uncle Gregory? He is gone," I stammered.

My words seemed to have a startling effect upon him. His eyes flashed and he fairly screamed in a sort of horrible rattle.

"You fool! He is my nephew, Richard. I am your Great-uncle Gregory."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE REAL GREGORY DEANE.

I SHALL never forget the awful shock his words gave me, and; to judge from her face then, neither will Shirley. Together we stared at the man on the couch, and our minds leaped back swiftly over the events of the last three days.

It had been the nephew, then, Richard Deane, who had masqueraded as the real uncle and tricked us so skillfully.

My face grew hot as I realized how I had lent myself to that trickery; had even offered to help to my own deceiving. Oh, he was clever, all right! And there could be no doubt that this was Gregory Deane; for Peter could be relied on to know his own master; but he had never seen him and so the deception had proved easy. But, surely, Shirley must have known her own father; and yet if she had she was an even better actor than he, in not showing it.

I remembered now her telling me that she had tried the stage once in her career.

The thought was unpleasant, and I put it aside hastily, together with all other speculations as to what Uncle Gregory had been doing in the past—since the immediate thing to do was to see to Uncle Gregory in the present.

He had fallen into a sort of coma, and lay so still that I feared he was already beyond help. Shirley had realized this sooner than I; after her first exclamation at our great-uncle's words, she had stood for a moment with compressed lips and drawn brows; then, rousing herself, had gone to Uncle Gregory's side where she was directing Peter, in a most efficient way, to place hot cloths over the sick man's heart. Peter had produced both cloths and hot water in a miraculously short time; and while Shirley wrung them out, Peter and I applied them according to her direction.

"He's fair starved," Peter groaned over the pitifully shrunken body thus disclosed, whose bones seemed about to stab through the flesh. "If I could only catch the murdering devil—"

Inwardly I echoed him; if murder had not actually been done, it had come pretty close to it. It was clear to me that Uncle Gregory must have been shut up here all the time we were in the house, and I saw now why the door had been locked and the dresser drawn in front of it.

It was devilish work, and the thought that we had lived unsuspectingly for three days with this imposter was far from pleasant. Evidently it had suited his ends to let us alone; I could not flatter myself that we had owed our immunity to any other reason.

"He must be fed," Shirley interrupted my thoughts. "Peter, have you any bouillon cubes? Good. Heat some immediately and bring it up here as quick as you can. Only the broth, no crackers, mind."

Peter hurried off, and we were left together to continue the treatment with the hot cloths. It was succeeding, without a doubt, for some color had come back to his lips and cheeks, and warmth to his extremities.

"Where did you learn so much about nursing?" I asked, to cover the awkward pause.

"I thought of being a nurse, among other things, but I only studied one year. I really don't know much about it."

"You've done the right thing here, evidently. Do you think he will recover?"

"Yes, I think so, but he must be fed very carefully. I believe we should have the doctor here to see him—at once!"

"I'll go for him," I volunteered, glad to get away and think things over by myself. "I was starting to go after him for our other invalid, but I went in my uncle's room and fell asleep, somehow. Come to think of it, I don't believe that sleep was quite natural."

"Why?" asked Shirley, more I expect because she, like me, was trying to keep away from unpleasant topics than because of any real interest.

"I felt tired, and I took one swallow of the whisky your—I mean Uncle Richard left in my room. About five minutes after, my head began to feel queer, and I just couldn't keep awake. It must have been drugged."

"By Jove, I've got it! He must have doped it, and left it in the room that night, in the hope that I would take enough to keep me quiet the rest of the time. The only thing that saved me was that I was too lazy to get up and get it. Clinch must have got hold of it later, but I don't understand why it didn't put him to sleep, too, at once."

"I see!" cried Shirley. "He probably took just enough to excite him at first. Morphin acts that way sometimes on people who are not normal; and then the reaction came and he is sleeping it off. I don't think a dozen knocks on the head would do him much harm."

"That's a relief. At least we won't have him long on our hands as an invalid. You know him quite well, then?"

"He's not a friend of mine, if that is what you mean."

Fortunately, Peter entered at this moment with a steaming bowl of broth, for the conversation was growing a little strained. I left them both feeding the sick man, and went on out to get the boat.

In a few minutes I had settled into a long, steady stroke that carried me swiftly

on toward the village. I was glad of both the exercise and the leisure to arrange my ideas, which had been very much upset in the last hour. However much the discovery of the trick that had been played upon us had solved the mystery, several questions were still left unanswered. Who, for instance, was the man who had been struggling in the room that night with the false Uncle Gregory. I might have thought he had lied about it, except for the fact of having distinctly heard the noise of the struggle, myself. Again, had he found the paper in the safe for which he was looking?

As I went over the events of last night, I was struck by the ingenuity with which he had turned everything to his own end, and the cleverness with which he had used us both for his purpose. Had he used Shirley without her knowledge? That was the question that still bothered me. I didn't think for a moment that she had come there expecting to meet him, or had known him at the very first, but I was not so sure that she didn't recognize him later and become an unwilling confederate.

Her speech to him in the library had smacked of a defiance founded, perhaps, on suspicion—if not knowledge. Knowing her as I did, I could realize just how unwilling she would be to help on her father's schemes in any way, and only an unusual pressure could have made her do it. But in that case she must have known about Uncle Gregory being shut up, and that I positively refused to believe.

No, he had probably made her think Uncle Gregory had fled or, more probable still, threatened her with something unless she would help him. This last would explain her change in attitude toward me the morning on the rocks; something must have been told her then which had changed her from a frank companion into an active enemy, but here another thought stopped me. If she knew her father was there in the rôle of Uncle Gregory, why did she take the trouble to leave the note for him downstairs on the safe, when she could, with much less trouble, have told him herself? Had it been a last silent appeal, in case she had been forbidden to speak?

Hang it, everything was in a worse tangle than before, out of which only one fact was clear; that the relations between Shirley and myself were growing more strained, rather than less. I made up my mind that I would have a frank talk with her and clear matters up as soon as possible, and having come to this sensible conclusion, I set myself with renewed energy to the task of reaching the village.

It was only three miles to the other end of the island and as the sea was calm, except for great oily swells, souvenirs of the recent storm, I made good time. I left my boat beached on the graveled shore and made my way to the nearest doctor.

After having been shut up for three days among all these mysteries, it was a relief to be out among other people, and the narrow, cobble streets of the old town seemed very pleasant to me as I swung along in the October sunshine. I found the doctor that Peter had recommended and, fortunately, he was at home and able to go with me at once. He was a young man who had just come, and had, I imagine, more cleverness than the usual seaport doctors, for he asked no questions, but picked up his bag and started off with me.

I was not to get off so easily from the rest of the village gossips. As we passed the combined post-office and town hall, several lounging men stared at us curiously and one of them called out to me:

"Say, are you Carlos Brent? There's a telegram just come for you."

I thanked him and went inside, well aware that they would immediately question the doctor during my absence. The postmaster handed me the telegram and watched me curiously as I tore it open. It was dated from the mainland twenty miles off, and ran as follows:

Look at once in the dressing-room. The key is under the mat. All well. R. D.

So, at last, he did not wish his victim to die, and had stopped in his flight long enough to send this warning telegram. It showed, too, that he had not intended leaving the precise moment he had; undoubtedly Clinch had hastened matters. But the telegram might not have been de-

livered for another day, as it was, and if I had not heard the tapping my great-uncle might not have lasted that long; so I considered that this hardly let Richard Deane out of the responsibility for a cowardly crime.

The mocking message at the end was so much in keeping with the unscrupulous nature of the man, that if I had met him at that exact moment, it might not have passed off so harmlessly as on our first encounter.

The postmaster probably read my thoughts from the vicious energy with which I crumpled up the telegram and thrust it into my pocket.

"Bad news?" he hazarded.

"No."

"Mr. Deane sick?" he went on, unruffled by my short answer. I had calculated on the gossip that would follow the news of my uncle's imprisonment and the plot of his brother, and decided already that no one should know the exact truth except the doctor, whom I felt I had to trust and could more safely confide in. I had my story ready, and told it with every appearance of easy willingness to talk.

"He has had a sort of stroke, been unable to eat for several days, and is very weak. Fortunately, we were with him while old Peter was away, and did the best we could until it was possible to get the doctor. The storm blew down the bridge and it was too rough to use a boat."

"I know," he nodded. "Terrible blow, most the worst we've had in nigh forty years. Even the government supply boat couldn't get to the lightship and had to lay up in Bedford Harbor a couple of days."

"Did that big fellow with the ugly mug and the crumpled ear, land your way? He's been wanderin' around the island like a crazy man, tryin' to git some one to take him over in a boat to your place. Wouldn't say what he wanted, and from the cast of his face, it wa'n't no good."

"Our constable kept an eye on him regular, but he ain't done no harm yet we could jug him for. Couldn't get no one to lend him a boat until yestiddy afternoon when he got one from a Portugee, and set sail in it alone bound your way."

"He's there, all right, but with a cracked skull. The waves broached his boat and drove him on the rocks, where he got a nasty knock and I pulled him in unconscious. The doctor will patch him up, and then we can find out his business."

My apparent frankness had its effect on the postmaster, and we parted good friends. I saw him regaling the loungers with the news, and I congratulated myself on my foresight in having my story prepared in advanced.

I rejoined the doctor and we set out on our row. I had taken a liking to him from the start, and I've learned to know men at once in my trade. I liked him still better when I had taken him into my confidence, and told him such of our three-days' adventures as I felt could not be withheld, finishing with a request that for Mr. Deane's sake he would not tell anyone. He nodded.

"Certainly, I see no reason why the story should get out, unless, of course, one of them should die. In that case there would have to be an inquest. However," he added, "I don't think that is likely, judging from your account."

"Thank you," I said heartily, "you have relieved my mind. I believe the gossip will be more likely to kill Mr. Deane than the starvation."

"If the folks in this town ever started to gossip they wouldn't let it die of starvation," he observed dryly. "I've only been here six months, but they've got all my private history made out for me. Had us divorced, and a second husband found already for my wife. Guess I don't hand them any real gossip to chew on this time."

I laughed, and gave the doctor one of the two cigars I had bought with a quarter borrowed from Peter. "We made the dock in record time, and I brought the doctor at once to my great-uncle's room where he was lying quite comfortably in his own bed."

He was conscious now and anxious to talk, but the doctor would not let him. He made a thorough examination and said that Shirley had done the right thing.

"Feed him only broth and keep him quiet, no talking to-day, Mr. Deane. I'll

come again to-morrow. Now, for the next patient."

He looked more grave over Clinch Murphy.

"He's had a big dose of morphin. Make the strongest coffee you can and pour it down him, then keep him awake, and in constant exercise if you can. The knock on the head doesn't amount to much."

He left some medicine to give him if he seemed too weak, and took his leave, Peter offering to row him over to the mainland.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CLINCH'S STORY.

SHIRLEY and I were left to the job of waking up Clinch. We gave him the coffee as the doctor directed, and then, one on either side of him, dragged him up and down the room until we were nearly worn out. He would not do anything for me, but he made a real effort for Shirley, of whom he seemed rather to stand in awe.

"Gee!" he moaned at length. "It's worse 'n having to get up for the twentieth round when you're groggy. Leave me lie, can't you?"

We walked him remorselessly, until I decided that, if he were not out of danger, we were utterly worn out. He was sweating profusely and his pulse was normal, so we let him go back to the bed again, where he fell into a natural sleep.

It was now past three o'clock and none of us had had anything to eat since breakfast, so when Peter came back and suggested luncheon, we accepted it gladly. We were both very quiet during the meal; I because I was hungry, and Shirley for reasons of her own.

"See here," I said, as she rose to go upstairs, "you must sleep for a couple of hours and I will stay with Uncle Gregory. I had my nap this morning, and your rest was broken last night."

She protested she wasn't sleepy, but there were circles under her eyes that told another story. We arranged that the two of us were to take alternate watches with Uncle Gregory, Peter announcing that he

was going to take the night. In this way we got along very comfortably, and as both our invalids began to recover rapidly, by the next day things looked decidedly brighter.

Only one thing troubled me; my relation with Shirley, already difficult, was growing more so every day. She not only openly avoided me, but steadily resisted any attempts to get back to the old familiar footing.

There was certainly something she was hiding, and I made up my mind I must discover it and find what was keeping us apart. It struck me that Clinch must know something. He was still weak, but conscious, and consuming inordinate quantities of food, according to Peter. I went into his room that morning determined to see what I could find out. He looked up surlily as I came in.

"Good morning, Murphy," I said cheerfully. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Got any suds?"

"I'm afraid not. The island is dry, and the only whisky in the house seems to have been doped by your friend, the Big Swell, and you've had enough of that, I should imagine. Have a cigar?"

He took it with a shade less of surliness, and I lit a cigarette.

"He thought he had me fixed all right," he grunted, "but I was onto his game."

"I wish I had been as wise as you—he fooled me completely."

He shot me a quick look.

"Say, weren't youse in the uncle game, too? I thought youse were covering the lay with him."

An unpleasant light passed over me. So he thought I was a confederate! The explained why he had been so suspicious of me when I tried to keep him from seeing Shirley, while I, on my part, had also thought him a confederate.

Another thought struck me, dispelling the annoyance I felt at his absurd suspicion; if Shirley, as I thought, was in league with the man, then it was impossible for her to be aiding her father's plans. It was the most pleasing discovery I had yet made, so I fairly beamed on Clinch.

"That's a good joke! I was suspecting *you* all the time of being his pal. He made a pretty fool of me all right, and I felt sure he was my Uncle Gregory. How were you so clever as to guess he wasn't?"

My frank admiration pleased him, as I intended it to. He gave me an almost friendly leer, which had the effect of making his face uglier, if possible.

"You can't fool a man who is after your blood," he chuckled. "Say, do you know what he done to me out in Chi six years ago? Pulled a big con game, and then had it framed up on me while he lit out with all the kale. I was sent up to do my stretch while he got clean off. Well, I swore that as soon as I got out he'd get his from me, and he's going to—if I have to walk from here to hell."

He clinched one big fist, and I began to understand my Uncle Richard's hasty departure. One blow from that would crush in a skull like eggshell and only the man's drugged condition had kept him from his full vengeance. It had been a wise thought of Richard Deane to fill him full of morphin, but he should have either halved or doubled the dose.

"You'll have to swim part of the way, I'm afraid, but he's a thorough rascal and deserves punishment."

"You're more sensible than you look," growled Clinch. "Lucky for you."

I accepted the dubious compliment as gracefully as I could, for I wanted to get more out of him.

"But, you haven't told me how you knew he was here."

"The girl tipped me off."

My heart sank. So Shirley was in it, after all!

"How?" I asked quickly.

"I had just got out of the stir, and came to New York because I heard the Big Swell was working down that way. A pal of mine put me wise to her address; I knowed her and the Big Swell wasn't on good terms and I thought she'd be glad to tip me off for a chance of getting even."

"She wouldn't betray her father?"

He snorted.

"Being her father didn't make *him* any kinder to her or her mother. She was a

swell woman, a regular lady she was; and he treated her like a dog till she up and left him, her and the girl, who was fifteen then.

"She died a few years after, and Shirley was left to look out for herself. Much call she's got to love her father."

I was silent, remembering Shirley's words in the library about not raising her hand to save her father. Had she known to whom she was saying it? And yet those words did not chime with the fact that she had stolen down-stairs to leave a message for that same father. It was still a mystery, I must get some more out of Clinch.

"She didn't tell you, then? I thought you said she did?"

"Well, not exactly; women is queer cattle. She said she didn't know, but I guessed she did, so I hung around keeping an eye on her until I saw her leave the house with a bag. I trailed along out of sight and saw her go on the Sound boat."

"I followed without her seeing me. I guessed she was going to meet him and warn him that I was on his track. Little fool, she ought to have been as glad to get even with him as I was."

"Ah!" I exclaimed. I saw now why Shirley had tried to warn her father. When Clinch came, knowing his desire for revenge, she realized that her father's life was in danger. So she did care, after all!

"Why did you go into her stateroom?" I asked abruptly.

"Well, it struck me she might have something in her bag that would give me the tip, so I slipped in while she was on deck and was going through her things when she came back and found me. I tried to make her tell me by scaring her, but, Lord, she gave me the devil instead and run me out. She's got spunk, that girl."

I privately agreed with him.

"I thought I saw you following us over the moors. How did you hide in the boat, and why didn't you come across that first night?"

"Hiding on the boat was soft, I went down in the engine-room. I followed you on the moors to make sure where you were going. I thought you was in with her, too, so I judged it best to keep out of sight."

"Like a fool, I took a nap among the dunes just the other side of the bridge. It was after one o'clock when I woke, but when I went down to cross over, the bridge had gone and there I was on the wrong side. Just my luck, damn it!"

I agreed with him. If he had got over our three days might have been very different. Another idea struck me.

"How did you recognize Richard Deane? He had made up so skilfully to look like his uncle that we were both deceived."

"How long ago since you have seen your great-uncle?" he asked. "And had you ever seen this uncle?"

I was obliged to confess it had been sixteen years since I had seen Uncle Gregory, but I had never seen his nephew, at all.

"Then he could fool you all right; I guess Shirley was wise all the time. He was the son of Gregory's oldest brother—pretty near the same age as Gregory himself. He'd of nearly fooled me, too, only I seen him one day when he was prowling along the rock there and he didn't think no one was around."

"He was looking at the water and cussing and he didn't stand or act like the old man then, and I knew him at once. I guessed he was up to some mischief, because his uncle had some hold over him, and I got a boat and came as fast as I could. Then I got a clip on my head and he filled me full of dope, the big devil, but I nearly got him and I will yet."

As I looked at him I didn't envy Richard Deane having this able-bodied vengeance following him around.

"Well, it seems we've all been at cross-purposes. I thought you were in with him, and when my supposed Uncle Gregory warned me against you and asked me to guard you, I thought I was doing the wisest thing. He told me to keep Miss Shirley out of the room, too. I wonder just why."

My face felt red as I recalled the way I had kept her out, and the clever manner in which I had been tricked. It was beginning to dawn on me that I had been considerable of a fool, and Clinch's words were not reassuring.

"Most likely he was afraid she'd give the thing away at the last and squeal on

him to me. She's a mighty square little kid and not used to his ways."

"Clinch," I said earnestly, "I'm a good friend of hers, and I believe you are, too. Will you tell me honestly if you think she was in this scheme of shutting up Mr. Deane and getting his money? It's very important for me to know."

He looked at me with his sharp little eyes, into which came presently a knowing twinkle.

"I'm on," he drawled. "I don't blame you, either. Shirley's a fine girl, and a girl with spirit. She'd make a fine pal in any sort of game."

"Not," he added quickly, as my face grew stormy, "that she'd stand for any crooked business. Ain't I told yer she wouldn't hold with her father's ideas and got out and left him? Her mother was a darned fine sort, too, and she sure was mighty good to me. Never treated me like dirt the way he did."

"But you haven't answered my question—was she in this?"

"She must have been to have gone right off to meet him," he protested.

"But she came here for an entirely different purpose." I explained briefly about my uncle's money, and his having sent for her. He listened attentively.

"Gee, that's another kinda dog! No, she didn't come to meet him, then. He must have found out her plans and come to meet her. Thought he could make her work in along with him by threatening to queer up her game. 'cause then she'd do what he wanted. That sounds more like it, don't it?"

I was forced to confess it did.

"But I don't think she would agree to injuring Uncle Gregory, in any case," I insisted.

"He probably told her he wasn't hurting the old man"—Clinch had heard the whole story from Peter, evidently—"only scarin' him, and he'd tip her off in time, so she could find him and get all the credit."

Again, I was reluctantly forced to admit that this theory sounded plausible. Only, again, why had she left the note on the safe warning that "he" was here when she must have known that her father had seen Clinch

and was already forewarned? Surely she could have communicated with him in some less clumsy way, unless she had purposely wanted to leave evidence that would show her ignorance in the event of discovery.

Confound it, I was getting involved in a network of suspicion and, so far as I could see, Clinch's statements had not made matters better. I thanked him, and went away thoroughly depressed, but clinging obstinately to my belief that Shirley could not possibly be a partner to anything underhand or treacherous.

CHAPTER XXVII.

REVELATIONS.

IT was now time for my turn to stay with Uncle Gregory, so I went up to his room where I found him sleeping, with Shirley reading beside his bed. She got up, and after giving me a few directions, silently left the room.

I sat down in the arm-chair and studied the face of the sleeping man, observing with satisfaction that he had improved greatly under good care and skilful feeding; and although still weak, had already lost much of his emaciated look.

Seen, thus, in repose, I could trace a decided resemblance to his nephew; the shape of the face was much the same; but, although the nose was not so fine, the mouth was not so mean. It was a face of far less promise and brilliancy, but more likeable; and although there were hard lines in it, they seemed to have come more from a shy nature thrusting away the world, than from one at enmity with it. On the whole, I decided that I could feel more at ease with the owner of this face than with his nephew.

As if he were conscious of my scrutiny, he opened his eyes, which were quite the best features of his face, direct and clear, although shrewd.

"Well, Carlos," he said, "we've given you rather a different welcome from what you expected, eh?"

"It was lively, to say the least! I suppose Shirley has told you how we arrived to find the house completely empty."

"Not so empty as you think," returned my uncle dryly. "At the precise moment you rang the bell, my nephew had just threatened to kill me. I wonder he didn't attack you also, but he probably thought he could get off better unseen."

"Please tell me how it happened—unless it will tire you too much."

"I don't think so, it will be a relief to tell it to some one. If you had been tied up and gagged for three days in that miserable little room you'd be glad to talk, too."

"I had my suspicions that Richard intended making an effort to get a certain incriminating document, which I hold, and I knew he would stop at nothing to attain his ends. I had taken every precaution: isolated myself as far as possible; and kept a large, savage dog—"

"He's gone," I interrupted. "Your brother told me he had died some time ago. I found a dog-collar under a heap of things in the laundry."

"He killed poor Jock, then. Peter left me with misgivings, but his sister was really very sick—and I expected to have you with me—"

"One moment," I broke in again. "Did you intend to ask Shirley and me at the same time?"

He looked puzzled.

"Why, no, I thought I'd asked her two weeks later—I must have confused the dates. It is fortunate she came down, however, for she is a splendid little nurse. Peter tells me that but for her quick action, I might have died; and as it seems I owe my being discovered to you, Carlos, I have to thank you both equally."

Either his illness had softened Uncle Gregory or he was not so crabbed as we had thought; for he gave me the grateful smile of a shy man deeply moved.

"I'm very glad to have been of service," I said, moved in my turn, but not knowing just how to show it. "The credit really belongs to Shirley, she has been very plucky all through it. How did you manage to make the tapping I heard?"

"I couldn't move hand or foot, but I could roll a little from one side to the other, and I found out that when I did so, one foot of the cot hit against the wall, making the

sound you heard. Hearing you move about the room, I tried to attract attention in that manner, but with each tap the cot was pushed further away; and I was just giving up hope when you answered me.

"I tried to signal again, but couldn't beyond a few taps. What a relief it was when you broke in the door, no one will ever know!"

"But your nephew didn't intend to have you starve—at least he sent a telegram to-day telling me to look for you." I showed it to him.

"No, I don't think he quite planned to murder me; if he had, he would have done so in the beginning. He did threaten to, but I knew he would not dare to carry it out and so defied him. He wanted the combination of the safe, and when he saw that I would not give it to him and was unafraid, he said he would break it open himself."

"I see!" I exclaimed. "He was the man that I nearly caught the first night! And to think that you and he were shut up there all the time that we were exploring what we took to be an empty house!"

"The very knowledge that you were there was what drove me to desperation. I guessed it must be you when the front door bell rang, and uncautiously cried out that my great-nephew Carlos had come and would protect me.

"Then Richard sprang on me like a tiger, bound and gagged me after a struggle, and then leaving me helpless on the couch, went softly to the head of the stairs and listened. After a few minutes he went down."

"Then it must have been he who opened the front door and went out while we were exploring in the rear," I cried. "I felt sure the door was locked the first time."

"Yes, I always keep it locked. Richard had got in through a small window in the side, but he must have judged it safer or easier to leave by the front."

"But later I heard a door opening or closing while we stood in the hall. It seemed a little ways off."

"That must have been my door blowing to. I remember it did so, to my joy, for I hoped it would attract your attention and

you would come up. Oh, the agony I suffered, knowing that you were so near and I was so helpless!"

"It was a devilish trick!" I cried hotly. "It makes me wild even now, to think that you were shut up here all the time and I didn't know it!"

"He is a devil and he will answer for it," Uncle Gregory fairly hissed. His anger exhausted his strength and he lay back with white lips.

"You are tiring yourself, uncle, please stop now and tell me the rest another time. Shirley will think I've been a bad nurse if I let you go on."

"I don't care," said my great-uncle obstinately, "it will tire me more to stop before I've told you all his villainy!"

He was growing so excited that I realized it would indeed do more harm to try and silence him, so I continued my questioning.

"Tell me everything then—when did he come back and why? I heard the front door slam while we were at supper and thought it was the wind."

"That was when he came back, probably the wind may have shut the door before he could help it. He would hardly have wanted to make a noise that would bring you up. I had been lying there for over an hour, hoping that he had gone for good and that you would soon find me, when the door opened softly and in he came again.

"He told me, like the sneering devil he is, that he couldn't give up my society so quickly, and that he would stay with me until you had gone to bed, and then open the safe at his leisure. I was obliged to remain helpless, while you came up-stairs, and even tried the very door behind which I lay."

I clenched my fists in impotent rage at the way I had been fooled. Why hadn't I guessed what was behind the locked door and burst it open? There were other facts, however, which I was burning to know.

"Why didn't he make off at once the first time he went out?"

"I think he intended to, but he was desperately set upon getting the paper that night. He probably reflected that you be-

ing ignorant of which was my room, he would be safe in there with the door locked. Then when you had gone to bed, he could steal out and open the safe at his leisure. That was why he came back."

"But he must have known he had to leave after our struggle later."

"Yes, but when he reached the spot where he had left his boat, he found that the waves had broken it loose and smashed it on the rocks. He knew I had a motor-boat in the boat-house, but it was too small to face such a sea in; and when he tried the bridge it was down and all communication with the mainland was cut off."

"He was a virtual prisoner, and even if he had accomplished his purpose of opening the safe, he could not leave before the storm subsided. There were you and Shirley to be reckoned with, as well."

"Rather a tight fix."

"Yes, but one to which he was equal. It was this situation which gave him the idea of masquerading as me. He had to choose between skulking uncomfortably outside without food or shelter, or staying comfortably within with every opportunity to continue his efforts at the safe. It was a scheme which appealed besides to his love of trickery."

"It was abominably clever," I admitted with reluctant admiration.

"Stupidity has always been the least of his faults," returned my uncle dryly. "I guessed most of this from what he let drop, for I was shut in the little room tightly bound, and had no other means of knowing. He threatened me, and tried in every way to break down my will, but I was firm."

"He gave me food at first, but kept me later under the influence of morphin, of which he seemed to have a quantity. The second night I managed to break free and tried to scream for help; I heard you hammering on the door, but before you could finally open it, he had overpowered me and dragged me into the next room."

"And when I finally got in he was holding his own throat, declaring that some one had choked him," I exclaimed. "And I—like a fool—believed him."

"As I said, he is clever enough to fool any one," returned Uncle Gregory. "Any

one, at least, who does not know his lying nature. But I knew, and refused to be cajoled. It was then that he gave me the morphin, and threatened to starve me if I did not tell."

"I gathered also from what he let drop that he was posing as me; he could deceive you easily, since neither of you had seen me since you were children, but I knew Peter would be back as soon as the storm subsided, and he could not fool him."

"If I could hold out that long, I would be safe. The rest was like a dreadful dream to me until you came."

He closed his eyes with a sigh, and I thought he had said enough.

"Don't talk any more. I can see now how it all was and how cleverly he got us to aid him. There is only one thing I would very much like to know; when he blew open the safe did he get the paper he was looking for?"

My great-uncle opened his eyes, and a faint gleam of amusement came into them.

"He didn't get the paper, for the good reason that it was not in the safe."

"But," I exclaimed, "why did you refuse to give him the combination, then?"

"Because I wanted him to think it was in the safe! It kept him both amused and busy, and off the scent of the real place."

I looked at my uncle with growing respect.

"Where was it then?"

"In this room."

"In this room? Where he could find it? Surely he must have hunted here?"

"Of course he did; he spent hours searching every possible spot. I expected he would, so I had previously taken the paper from the little wall safe there behind that picture, and put it where I knew it would not be found."

I gazed around in astonishment.

"Where was that?"

"I've read quite a good many detective stories in my day, and in the greatest of them all, 'The Purloined Letter,' Poe has the letter hidden in the most exposed place in his desk."

"You didn't—"

"Under these circumstances it would

have been foolish to have put it in the desk, but I compromised by putting it into another spot as well used."

I shook my head as he paused expectantly.

"I haven't the faintest idea, unless—it's the bed."

My uncle shook his head in turn with a smile.

"I'm afraid you also are not as religious as you should be. Please hand me that Bible."

I jumped to my feet and caught up the Bible, a huge black family affair with heavy gilt-edged pages, which lay on a table by the window.

"By jove, not in here?"

"I think so. Yes, here it is just where I placed it—in 'Revelations'!"

My uncle's dry tone was irresistible; that and the cleverness of the scheme struck me amidstips. I fairly roared with laughter to which Uncle Gregory joined a feeble cackle.

"You've won," I exulted, "even at the loss of the safe."

He grew suddenly grave.

"I had to! This paper is the only hold I have over a human wolf, I couldn't afford to lose it. It's a check for twenty thousand dollars with my forged signature done by him five years ago and it means twenty years in jail if I choose to press the charge.

"I had warned him when it was done that if he did any more crooked work, I would expose him. He probably had a job in hand and needed the check to protect himself.

"He knew I would do as I said, and"—my great-uncle's voice grew stern and hard and his eyes implacable—"if this attempt is repeated, I shall certainly do so. I intend to leave it in the hands of my lawyer with instructions that if he does not hear from me by the first of each month, to prosecute Richard. Only, in this way will I be safe. I should have done this before."

I saw that he was getting excited again and suggested that he sleep a little. When he was quietly dozing once more, I sat there reflecting on what I had heard. Nearly everything that had passed in the last three

days was fairly clear to me now, but one thing still remained a disquieting mystery; how much had Shirley to do with it?

Clinch's story had only made the matter worse, and her own attitude was merely deepening it. It had long become evident to me that she was purposely avoiding being alone with me; and the only time I had opened the subject of her father, she had flatly refused to continue. Whether Uncle Gregory had any idea as to her share in it, I could not determine; he had spoken of her to me very nicely and with much gratitude.

Was the harm that an unscrupulous, clever man had planned, to react in this fashion on his daughter; and was I to carry the poison of suspicion around with me for the rest of my life? The thought nearly drove me frantic, for I realized now what Shirley meant to me and what I wanted to be to her.

I resolved to tell her that nothing should come between us, and that I trusted her and believed her entirely innocent of any complicity in, even knowledge of, her father's scheme. But, did I really believe, this last, when every bit of reasoning I possessed pointed another way?

Hang it all, I would lie if necessary, I couldn't live without Shirley, no matter what she had done!

I heard her coming at this moment, and I stepped quickly out into the hall.

"What is it?" she exclaimed at the sight of my set face. "Is uncle worse?"

"No, I want to speak to you."

"Can't it wait? Uncle's beef-tea will be getting cold."

She had a cup and saucer in her hand. I took them from her and set them down on the table.

"He is asleep now, it won't do him any harm to wait. I want to talk to you."

She raised her eyebrows at my masterful tone, but she waited nevertheless.

"Shirley," I said abruptly, "will you marry me?"

"No, Carlos, I won't."

Her calm refusal angered me. I was conscious I hadn't made a good beginning, but I blundered on.

"Wait a moment. You are angry at me

because you think that I believe you helped your father. Well, I don't. I don't believe you had anything to do with it at all."

She did not answer at once, but looked at me queerly.

"And suppose that you did believe that I had helped him? Would you still want to marry me?"

"Yes," I answered stoutly.

She laughed mirthlessly.

"You make a poor liar, Carlos, and you are also not very complimentary to my intellect. Do you suppose that I can't see why you are doing this, that you don't really believe me innocent?"

"You are very chivalrous and magnanimous, but I don't intend to be the subject of either. No doubt now, as things are, you will get your heart's desire and be made the heir, but I don't intend to play the part of beggar-maid to your Cophetua."

Her words stung me, as she had intended they should, but the very injustice of them held me speechless. Before I could get my voice, she had slipped past me and into the room with a little sound that resembled a dry sob.

I let her go. What was there I could say or do, after all, when she held such an opinion of me?—She had practically answered my question; if she could think that I was doing this merely as a sop to my conscience she didn't really love me, and the wisest thing would be for me to forget her. But, I had never wanted her so much at any time as I did at that moment, when she had just left me in scorn.

I doubt if any one ever carried a heavier heart than mine to bed, and of all the nights in that house, this was the most disturbed and wakeful. It didn't console me to realize that I had put my case in the most tactless way possible; and that any one with Shirley's hair-trigger pride would be apt to misunderstand me.

It was too late now to go back and do it over again—even if my own pride would have let me. Along about early morning, I had almost persuaded myself I didn't care a rap for Shirley, and that I intended to leave that very day, after first informing my uncle that I would have nothing to do with his money.

This somewhat relieved me, so I fell into a sleep at last.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

GREGORY DEANE'S DECISION.

BY the next day Uncle Gregory was very much improved; he looked well, ate heartily, and declared that his enforced fast had been good for him, after all. He really seemed to enjoy having us with him, and I felt almost a pang at having to tell him what I had decided the night before.

He was certainly the only happy person in the house that day, for Shirley was pale and quiet, and after my sleepless night I must have looked anything but cheerful. Evidently Uncle Gregory noticed it, for as I was sitting beside him making a pretense of reading, he asked abruptly:

"Has anything happened, Carlos, that you are not telling me?"

"Why, no, sir," I answered. "I think everything is going on well."

"Are you getting restless here? It is rather stupid to have to sit around with an old man like me, but I thought that you and Shirley would be company for each other."

"No, we're not," I blurted out, and was instantly sorry for the remark. I realized that I couldn't possibly tell Uncle Gregory just why Shirley and I had quarreled, for it would make him suspect her, which up till now, he had not shown any signs of doing.

He looked at me keenly.

"Have you quarreled? I hope it is not on account of—the money."

I seized gladly at this loop-hole his words gave me.

"I'm afraid that's it. This rivalry is bound to make some feeling between us, and I have been wanting to tell you as soon as you got well enough, that I would like to relinquish all my claim in favor of Shirley."

A little dry expression crept over my uncle's mouth, making him look less genial, and more like his nephew.

"Indeed, and what makes you think I intend to leave you my money?"

"Nothing at all, except that in your letter you suggested that one of us should be your heir. I want to say now, that while I'm glad I came down and was able to be of some help to you, if I had known how things were going to turn out, otherwise, I should never have done so.

"This whole idea of trying to get your money is abhorrent to me, and if it wasn't for my sister, Ethel, and her need, I should never have done it."

The relief of saying what I really thought was so great that I was more emphatic than I had intended. Uncle Gregory was silent so long that I began to be afraid lest I had hurt him, since after all he was my only relative and I had grown to have quite a liking for him.

"I hope you understand, sir," I added, "that it is not because I don't appreciate your asking me—only I'd rather be here on a different basis."

"Tell me about your sister Ethel," he said abruptly, paying no attention to my speech.

"She's my half-sister. My mother married twice, you know, and Ethel was nearly killed by losing her husband a year ago. She is threatened with consumption, and as she and little Carl have no one else to look after them, it's up to me."

"I had a good job on the *Planet*; but it wasn't enough, so I came here. If you can spare me now, I think I'll run back to-day and look up another job. I'm awfully glad I've got to know you, sir, and I hope you'll let me come again and visit you."

"I asked you to come down for two weeks," said Uncle Gregory coldly. "If you leave before that time, you certainly know what to expect. Don't be a fool, Carlos, and throw away all your chances because you have Quixotic notions about not competing with a girl. Isn't your sister more to you than Shirley?"

I dared not think how true his words were. It seemed to me, also, that underneath his coldness there was a real interest.

"Let's consider the matter closed, uncle," I answered quickly. "Only I'd like to part friends if possible."

Before he could answer, Peter came in with the mail which he had rowed over to

the village for. He handed me three letters which I opened eagerly, glad of some communication with my old life at last.

There was a brief note from Ethel, telling how much she had improved and that another month's stay would see her almost well. I hated to think how the money was to be had, but had it must be. The next was a line from my chum, Carter Coleman, saying that they missed me in the shop and that if Uncle Gregory proved stoney, I might be able to get my old job back again, provided I returned inside of a week.

This was better than nothing, at least, and I blessed the good old chap's thoughtfulness. I decided I would wire him to-day that I was coming.

The third letter was quite bulky, and the handwriting totally unfamiliar. I opened it with some curiosity.

MY DEAR NEPHEW CARLOS:

You and I were in such close companionship for the past three days that it seemed almost rude to leave you in the hasty way in which I did. But no doubt, by this time you will have found your Great-Uncle Gregory and understand the extent to which I was obliged to deceive you.

I make no apologies for it. When, after my first encounter with you in the night, I attempted to get away and discovered that my boat was wrecked and the bridge down, I decided that, unless I wished to starve or freeze while waiting for the storm to subside, I must do something quickly. You would not recognize me, I knew, but it would be difficult to explain just how I happened to be in the house. I could have knocked you on the head, perhaps, but that was too crude—I dislike crudeness. Yet I meant to stay in the house.

Fortunately, a happy idea came to me by which I could avoid killing you and yet have freedom for my search. It is always wise to make a man work for you than against you, I've found. I always carry a make-up box with me, as I find it very useful in such emergencies. I had already used it, while posing as a fisherman on a near-by island for the last three weeks, maturing my plans, and decided to use it again. There was enough resemblance between my uncle and me to enable me to successfully pass myself off with you and Shirley as your Great-Uncle Gregory.

Shirley, I hoped, would not recognize me, and you proved to have a confiding nature—of which I fear I rather took advantage. It was not to my interest that you and Shirley should be too good friends, so I fomented

some discord between you which succeeded admirably.

But all this explanation, while it may assist you in understanding my actions better, is not my chief object in writing. In spite of the fact that Shirley has no love for me, there was enough coincidence in our being together to lay her open to the charge of being in collusion with me. In fact, I purposely fostered this idea in order to keep your mind off my own actions. It was necessary that you should be suspicious of each other, and so I used every possible means to that end, hinting to her that your real object in proposing to divide the inheritance was that you feared to lose all and preferred half to none.

You, of course, remember that I created a like impression of distrust and her unfairness in your mind. I flatter myself that it was one of the best pieces of work I have done, but now that the need for it is over, it seems to me wisest to undeceive you. Shirley may have no further use for me as her father, but I cannot rest contented with the knowledge that she may be under a cloud of suspicion because of me. That is why I am writing to you, and you may rest assured that Shirley had no more knowledge of my presence in the house than you had.

I fancy she may have suspected me at the very last and that her quick wits had already guessed who I was when she made her speech about "preferring to see me dead." Probably she is right, but most probably I shall continue to flourish like the proverbial bay tree.

With many thanks for your able assistance—you were quite clever in finding the passageway, which I had already discovered and prepared in case of an emergency, and your zeal in exploring the attic directly above the room where your great-uncle lay, nearly caused me some embarrassment—but in the main you were very helpful.

Very sincerely,

RICHARD DEANE.

P. S.—The enclosure is for Shirley.

I finished this remarkable letter with two distinct feelings in my mind: one, a fierce desire to wring the writer's neck; the other an equally intense gratitude. The latter dominated, however, and the anger I felt at the sneering patronage of the letter was speedily lost in the joy of the thought that Shirley was free from all suspicion. But, would she ever forgive me for having suspected her? The selfish thought followed fast on the heels of my joy; I was sure she wouldn't!

My great-uncle had been watching me while I read this letter. I handed it over

to him now without any comment. When he had finished reading it he passed it back to me again.

"Rather a remarkable letter, and quite true to the writer's character. I think, however, that we can give him credit for a real desire to tell the truth, this time."

I agreed with him, for in spite of its cynical boastfulness and its tone of moral degeneracy, there yet ran through it a genuine note of affection and admiration for the daughter he had wronged.

I would have given a good deal to know just how Uncle Gregory felt about Shirley's share in the matter, but he did not say and I did not like to ask him; I could only hope the letter would do its work. For myself, I was determined to see Shirley and try to tell her again how sorry I felt, and I was just getting up to do so when she came into the room. She paid no attention to me, but walked over to my uncle.

"You're feeling much better now," she stated rather than asked.

"Yes, thanks to your good care and Carlos! If the weather holds good, I shall get outdoors to-morrow."

"Then you don't mind if I leave to-day? I have very important business that I must attend to in New York."

Uncle Gregory did not seem much surprised. He lay back and looked at her with his little dry smile.

"Isn't this rather a hasty decision? You remember that you and Carlos came out here for a special purpose."

She caught her breath for an instant, but went on steadily.

"Yes, I know very well, and that's exactly why I'm leaving. When I came out—although you may not believe it—I had no idea my father would come here or do what he did. I had nothing whatsoever to do with him, but the facts are against me, and there is nothing I can do to prove my innocence."

"Have I ever said that you came here to help your father get the money?" asked Uncle Gregory quietly.

"No; but it would be partly true if you did."

We both stared at that.

"I came here to get money for my father," she went on steadily, "but not with his knowledge. When he left my mother and me, he also left us debts amounting to five thousand dollars. I've paid off half-by degrees, but I couldn't raise the rest; and for my mother's sake and our name I must do it. She asked me to when she died, and I promised her I would.

"Then, when your letter came, it seemed like the chance I had been looking for, to honestly pay off all our debts, or at least give assurance to the creditors that they would be paid in time.

"You see," she went on with a little mirthless smile, "I am very mercenary in all this; but I did hope, too, that you would get to like me for myself, and that I could find some one who could give me the feeling I never was able to have for my own father.

"And then he came and spoiled it all, as he has spoiled everything for me all my life. No one can believe me honest, because I am his daughter, and so it is best for me to go."

I was springing to my feet, but Uncle Gregory restrained me with a look.

"I'm beginning to believe that I'm not at all popular," he observed with dry whimsicality. "It's quite true that you've had three very trying days, but they were hardly my fault. You have had just two days since in which to make my acquaintance, and now both you and Carlos propose dashing off instantly. It's hardly complimentary."

Shirley had started toward the door; now she turned back.

"Carlos!" she exclaimed.

"Yes; before you came in he had just declined receiving any of my money, and suggested my handing it all over to you instead. He seems to have no doubt about your right to it; neither, may I add, have I."

I blessed Uncle Gregory; he had the right idea after all. Shirley seemed unable to understand, but stood there silent.

"Perhaps this will help you," said Uncle Gregory in his driest tone, and handed her the letter.

I watched her expression as she read; surprise, hatred, distrust and, last of all, a radiance that made her more like the bright, happy Shirley I knew and loved. She looked up, the letter clasped in her hands.

"Oh, I am so glad!" she exclaimed; and I knew from the relief in her voice what she had been enduring all this time.

"Well, have you made up your mind to stay?" Sawdust could not have been drier than Uncle Gregory's tone; but there was a kindly gleam in his eyes.

"Uncle, do you really want me to stay?"

"Yes." Then, as if ashamed of the feeling in his voice, he said with whimsical lightness: "I can't get Peter to make beef-tea like yours; and that reminds me that I'm quite hungry now."

It was a tactful suggestion, for Shirley's control was giving away and tears were not far from her eyes. She caught up his hand, held it mutely an instant, and then fairly ran from the room.

"Rather a fine girl," said Uncle Gregory, and blew his nose with decision.

"It's darned fine of you," I said. "Thank you for making me square with Shirley. It means a lot to me."

"I think you'll have no more trouble there. May I ask if you and she—"

"It's only I," I sighed. "I care for her most awfully, but I don't know yet how she feels."

Uncle Gregory nodded. "That's good; she's worth it. By the way, you will decide to stay now?"

"I think not. It hardly alters matters."

Uncle Gregory sighed.

"Decidedly, I am unpopular. Have I got to beg you to stay, too?"

"I'll gladly stay, sir, but on condition Shirley gets the money."

"Now, see here," said Uncle Gregory vehemently, "I'm not dead yet, and I don't intend to die for a long time, in spite of the fact that it is very trying at my age to go through three days of starvation, and then have to manage two obstinate young people, besides. And I don't intend to leave my money to any of you."

His tone was so comically angry that I stood and laughed until my sides ached.

"You impudent young rascal," said Uncle Gregory, his eyes twinkling. "You aren't even annoyed?"

"Best thing you ever did," I cried. "Now I can go with a clear conscience and tell Shirley I love her."

"Hold on," said Uncle Gregory as I started toward the door. "You can tell her another thing: that I have decided to make you both equal heirs and advance a suitable amount for your needs until my demise, which I warn you will be long. I'm hard to kill, as you have just seen proved. No, don't stop to thank me; I've been sufficiently upset for one day. You'd better go and tell her at once."

And I went, leaving Uncle Gregory to lie back in his bed and chuckle to himself over his own little surprise.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AND THEN—

BUT it was not so easy as I thought to find Shirley; she was not in her room or in the little garden, and, although I searched every place I could think of, she was nowhere to be seen. I remembered the spot on the cliff where I had found her before, and where we had had our first quarrel, but this time there was no slim little figure in blue tam and yellow sweater. At a loss what to do, I sat down on a rock and pulled out my pipe to smoke and think it over.

Perhaps, after all, she wanted to be alone, and would be angry if I hunted her out. I longed desperately to take her in my arms and tell her what I felt, but was she ready to be taken?

I was painfully conscious that I hadn't acted in the least like a traditional hero; in fact, we had squabbled continually more like two children than lovers, and the memory of my boast on this very rock made me redden uncomfortably. Hang it all, what had possessed me to make such a caddish remark, which seemed now more in keeping with the villain of a cheap movie than a man who really respected and loved a girl as I did Shirley?

And only now did I realize just how

much I cared for my second cousin. What a plucky little soul she was, and what a good sport and companion! With her to work and live for, I should be a very different man; without her—well, I dared not think of that.

These last five days had taught me many things and tempered much of my easy cocksureness. This was a situation in which I had no experience to guide me, and which I felt small confidence in handling. I had not really believed that Shirley was her father's accomplice, but I had shown that I thought she knew of his presence there. That of itself would prejudice her against me, and even my offer to retire from the inheritance in her favor she would probably construe as a cheap attempt at magnanimity.

Draping myself in the sackcloth of these bitter reflections, I sat huddled up on the rock; my pipe for once tasted rank, and even the view spread before me failed to hold my gaze. The air was cool and winy sweet with the mingling of pine and salt; the dark, steel-blue water stretched away to a sharply cut sky-line, against which a sailing vessel drifted like a cloud.

Around me, and as far on the island as I could see, the many colors of scrub oak and gorse wove themselves into a bright fabric that clothed the moor with flaming beauty. But my eyes were blind to it; I wanted to see just one little head of red gold that held all my sunshine at that particular moment.

I don't know how long I sat, but I was roused from my dreary musings by a sound like a stifled sob. It seemed to come from just beneath me, and for a moment I thought I had imagined it; then I heard it again, unmistakably at my feet. There seemed to be nothing below but sheer rock, as the bluff slid away sharply at this high point.

I crept to the edge, looked over, and saw sticking out from beneath the tip of one small foot which I recognized at once for Shirley's. My heart jumped and then stood still. What if she had fallen down and was lying there hurt or in a dangerous position? I must get to her at once.

I did not call, for fear of startling her,

but looked about for the nearest way down. I found it by slipping on a loose stone and nearly going over into the water myself, but landed instead on a little spur of rock below, where, scrambling over jagged points and tearing my clothes and hands, I finally reached a broad ledge that ran under the face of the cliff directly beneath where I had been sitting.

Shirley was lying face downward on the short rock grass that lined the ledge, and did not move at my approach. Had she fainted, or was she too badly hurt to move? In my anxiety I made a jump for the ledge from the rock on which I was standing, slipped, and came down with a bump which jarred my anatomy—if it did not the rock.

"Shirley!" I called, sitting up and rubbing my knee, "are you hurt?"

Shirley sat up and looked at me. Her eyes were a little red and very distant.

"No," she answered calmly. "Are you? You seem to have been tumbling about a bit."

I fell silent, and could only stare at her with sudden rage. Here I had been eating my heart out for her, and all the time she was just below me, most probably well aware of both my presence and occupation.

I had come to the rescue, or so I thought, skinned my knuckles, and nearly broken a leg to get to her, and she calmly proceeded to make me ridiculous. I could restrain myself no longer.

"Shirley," I burst out, "I'd like to shake you!"

Well, I'd done for myself now. I had been wallowing in the dust of repentance only ten minutes ago and planning the abject doormat I was going to make of myself, and my very first speech was the lover-like one I'd just made. In fact, at that moment, I would have liked to revert to my cave-man ancestor and spanked her with a small-sized pine-tree!

Why were we always quarreling, and why did I like her all the better for it? Now, I supposed, she would never forgive me. She didn't seem so very angry, however—in fact, she smiled as though my speech had amused her.

"Just what have I done now?" she asked.

"I've been looking everywhere for you," I grumbled, "and then I saw your foot sticking out and was afraid you had fallen down and couldn't get up. Why didn't you answer me when I called a little while ago?"

"Am I supposed to come at your call?" she inquired still sweetly.

I knew the little vixen was playing with me and enjoying herself. Well, I wouldn't get into a rage just to suit her—two could play at that game.

"Of course, I wanted to see you."

I saw her mouth tighten at my masterful tone, but she said still with ominous gentleness: "That's why I came here: to be alone."

I settled myself comfortably back on the rock and rubbed my leg tenderly.

"Then, since we're all happy, let's have a talk."

A familiar gleam came into her eyes; it was just the remark, I knew, to make her thoroughly mad—but I was quite reckless by now. I didn't suppose she would ever forgive me, but I didn't intend to let her see that it mattered. To my surprise, she spoke quite amiably.

"What shall we talk about?"

"Well, for one thing—do you know what Uncle Gregory told me after you left?"

She shot me a quick glance. "No."

"He said that he did not intend to leave his money to any one of us."

It was mean of me, I know, but I could not resist the temptation to see how she, too, would take it. She made an indifferent gesture.

"I'm glad that's settled; I wouldn't take it, in any case. I suppose you, though, are disappointed."

Evidently she didn't mean to forgive me. "Not altogether," I returned quietly. "If you remember, I didn't intend to take it, either."

She colored faintly, and had the grace to look ashamed. "I shouldn't have said that. You were ready to behave like the very soul of honor."

The amend was spoiled for me by a faint tinge of sarcasm. I went on still quietly. "The fact remains that we may both have to take the money, after all."

"What do you mean?"

"Uncle Gregory followed up that statement immediately by saying that he intended instead to make us joint heirs."

She turned a startled face toward me.

"With no conditions attached?"

"None whatever, except that he said he proposed to provide us each an allowance until the time of his demise, which he meant to put off as long as possible; and I, for one, hope he does, for I like the old boy. I really think he is fond of us and believes that our separate reasons for wanting the money are fair enough."

Shirley turned her face away again, and was silent.

"You see," I went on after a short pause, "that rather complicates the question of refusing the money, doesn't it? He would feel decidedly hurt if we did—now."

"He is an old dear," said Shirley, and her voice quivered. "At least *he* didn't think I had helped my father plan all this dreadful thing."

"Shirley, do you really believe *I* thought you did?"

She kept her face still away. "Did you act as if you believed me innocent?"

I leaned forward. "How could I tell what to believe? You had knowledge that I hadn't, and all the time your—my Uncle Richard—kept poisoning my mind with cleverly distorted facts. I never believed at any time that you were in league with him, although I did feel that perhaps some affection for him as your father remained—enough to make you wish to help him to get off. You left a note to warn him, if you remember."

"How do you know?" she flashed.

"I saw you put it on the safe, and I gave it to him myself, unknowingly."

"Oh, then you were spying on me!"

"I was in the library looking for a book when you came in. I didn't know who it was, at first, so naturally remained hid behind the screen. If you like to call that spying on you, then I suppose it was."

"What did he say when he saw it?" she asked more quietly.

"I thought he seemed touched."

"Oh!" Her voice held an angry pain. "But why did you suppose I would take

all the trouble to go down and leave the message on the safe when it would have been much easier to have warned him myself of the presence of Murphy on the island?"

It was my turn to look ashamed. "That was what I asked myself, and I couldn't make it fit in. I know I've been unjust in even thinking that you had anything to do with it, but I swear to you, Shirley, that I never really believed that you knew your father was pretending to be Uncle Gregory."

"I should never have suspected you at all, but he himself hinted that you were in league with your father—that was the pretended reason he gave for keeping you out of Murphy's room when he really wanted to prevent the man's telling you the truth; and you must confess that all the rest—your evident recognition of Murphy, your changed attitude toward me—served to show that there was an understanding of some sort."

"Yes, I know," she murmured. "He told me lies about you, too, and I was equally suspicious. It was hard to believe any one or anything."

"And"—I pressed my advantage—"remember, that whenever I tried to get you to talk frankly with me, you always evaded answering. You said yourself that 'it would only complicate matters.'"

She grew an uncomfortable red and turned her eyes away.

"It would still, it was only foolish pride that made me act so. I realized that both you and our supposed great-uncle suspected me, and that appearances were all against me, and it only made me the more determined not to explain. Now I'll tell you everything I know."

"'Clinch' Murphy came to see me just before I left for here. I don't know how he got my address, but he appeared, and by every means in his power tried to get news of my father's whereabouts. I really didn't know myself, for, after my mother left my father when I was fifteen, we went West, hoping to lose sight of him altogether. At intervals he wrote to us for money which we scraped together, somehow, and then for a time we had peace."

"When my mother died, I ventured back East, and for a while I never saw him. I was trying my best all the time to save enough money to pay the creditors in our home town up the State—"

"Poor little girl," I exclaimed involuntarily.

"I didn't mind," she went on hurriedly. "So long as he left me alone. Then he came in one day quite nonchalantly. To my surprise he didn't ask for money, but said he had a big deal going through, and asked if I would come and live with him. He is a wonderful actor, as you well know, and he played the part of a repentant, loving father very well; said he was lonely, and wouldn't I brighten his old age"—her voice rang scornfully—"I remembered just how he had darkened my young age for me, and told him I would never speak to him again.

"He carried it off well, gave me his blessing, so to speak, and went away, still talking of the big deal he meant to put through, and all he could do for me. Then Uncle Gregory's letter came, and it seemed like a way of escape. I was just getting ready to go when Clinch came.

"I didn't tell him how recently I'd seen my father, for I knew he meant to harm him, if he could; and, much as I hated him, I didn't want that. I gave him all the money I could spare, and got rid of him, as I thought. He must have followed me to the boat, however, for that night, as you know, I found him in my stateroom, looking through my bag.

"I didn't suppose he could do any harm, as I never dreamed of my father being on Seetucket, or that Clinch would follow me out there. But, of course, to any one else our being on the boat together would have seemed more than a coincidence."

She looked at me proudly. I kept a discreet silence.

"I hadn't any certain idea at first that my father and the man on the island were the same until Clinch came. You will probably wonder, too, why I didn't recognize my father as our Uncle Gregory, but I've already told you that he was a superb actor and used to assuming all kinds of parts.

"I remember once his coming to us dressed as a Jewish peddler, and without even any wig or make-up deceiving both my mother and myself into giving him some of his own old clothes. It was especially easy for him to assume the part of Uncle Gregory, for there was a certain family resemblance, and he knew all his uncle's ways and mannerisms.

"I hadn't seen Uncle Gregory for a long time, so I easily accepted the other as our uncle. The rest was simple for him." She laughed bitterly. "He only had to play off one of us against the other and wait for his chance to open the safe."

"And I helped him to the best of my foolishness," I said with equal bitterness. I should have relished a settlement with him at that moment. "Anyway, he must have enjoyed your speech to him in the library about not lifting a hand if he were drowning."

"I'm glad I said it. But he never has had any doubt how I felt about him. And in spite of all that he has the imprudence to write me this letter—she pulled out a much crumpled sheet of paper which looked as though it had been the innocent victim of a fit of rage. "You can read it if you like."

I smoothed it out and read:

DEAR SHIRLEY:

As this is probably the last time I shall write to you, I hope you will not destroy the letter unread. It seems hard that in my old age, when I would like to give up my ways for others less questionable, that you should refuse me a daughter's care and affection. I know that it exists, and that you have still some feeling for the father who played with you and amused you as a child, for if you hadn't you would not have left that ring for me, the one I gave you on your tenth birthday. You may persist in calling it a bribe, but I shall always feel it was a token, and so I return it to you as a last gift from

Your father,

RICHARD DEANE.

I did not know what to think of this letter with its mixture of bombast and sincerity, and its clever appeal to the strongest trait in Shirley's make-up—loyalty.

Was he still hoping to win her back, and through her the paper and possibly the money? The expression on Shirley's face

as she watched me read promised badly for this. I glanced down at the ring which had tumbled out of the envelope and lay sparkling on the rock. As if she read my thoughts, Shirley picked it up.

"He thinks that he can make me forget by a cheap display of sentimentality," she said with set face. "Carlos, that man is a devil of cunning, but without the courage for big crimes. He would not kill, but he didn't mind crushing my mother's life out of her by inches. Well, he will not do that to me. I want no more of him or his."

With a sudden motion she flung the ring over the edge of the rock. Together in silence we watched it sparkle for an instant, then slip into a creaming wave and vanish.

"You are right," I said. "He was a clever man; we are well rid of him." Involuntarily, I turned over the sheet and saw a few lines on the back:

P. S.—You will remember that I gave you the decided impression that Carlos was making love to you in order to be sure of getting the money both ways. I've wronged him, perhaps, and you will do well to accept him. He is not very clever, but will make a better husband for all that.

The anger I might have felt at this slur on my intelligence was swallowed up in a sudden rush of light. So this was why Shirley had been angry at me, the thing that she had refused to tell me because it might only complicate matters. I saw it all clearly now, and just what I was to do.

"Shirley," I demanded, "did you really believe I wanted to marry you in order to get the money?"

She had been moodily watching the spot where the ring had fallen, now she whirled around and the swift color besieged her face.

"Why, what—" she stammered, then her eyes fell on the letter in my hand. "Oh, I forgot; I didn't intend you to read that. It's—it's too absurd."

She reached for the letter, but I held it back.

"It is," I agreed. "So we'll destroy it—like the ring."

I tore it across, and flung the pieces away. "Now, what I want to know is, did you believe this lie?"

She tried to evade me, but I held her eyes firmly.

"Yes, I did—at first," she answered in a small, subdued voice.

"And you don't—now?"

"How absurd you are—of course not."

"Then we are square for my foolish ideas about you at first. Shirley, there's something I must tell you now: you are the straightest little pal that ever a man could have, and I've loved you ever since we met on the boat. Your father is right; I am stupid, but I could make you a good husband. Won't you have me, dear?"

Shirley put both her hands in mine.

"My father only said that in the hope of keeping us apart. But I've loved you, too, Carlos, all the time—and I'll risk it!"

I took her in my arms, and for some blissful moments we forgot uncles, money, and past troubles.

"But, Carlos," said Shirley, when we came down from our lover's flight, "even though it has all turned out so well, and Uncle Gregory—who is a dear—will leave us both his money, I don't feel like living on him until then, do you?"

"No! I shall ask him to advance me something to help out Edith and her boy, and I know he's a good sort enough to do it, but I mean to get back my job on the *Planet*, and you, young woman, will have to live on what I provide."

"I'm not afraid," she returned saucily. "You're a good cook, anyway, as I've learned by experience."

"And I always keep my word, as you've learned also. Didn't I say I'd win you, too? And I have!"

I saw her chin stiffen, and the rebellious light I so loved flash into her eyes.

"You are horrid, too, and you'll never outgrow that."

"You don't want me to," I teased. "Besides, you look so adorable when you are angry, you little spit kitten."

"Kittens have claws and know how to use them," she answered calmly. "I can keep my word, too. When you made that nasty boasting speech on the rocks, I resolved to get even. How, do you think?"

"By marrying me?" I asked meanly.

"By giving your hair one more pull."

Before I could retreat she had made a dart at me and caught my hair in a most vicious grasp.

"Wow!" I yelled as she tugged at it with all the strength of her lithe young arms. "You little devil, do you want an entirely bald husband? Just for that I'll punish you as you deserve."

With a quick jerk, that nearly wrenched my hair from my head, I freed myself and

caught both her wrists. Then I drew her to me and planted a kiss firmly on her adorably rebellious lips.

This time, as once before, her body lay quiet in my arms, but she did not glare at me angrily. With a sigh of utter happiness she put her arms around my neck and returned by kiss. And I've had to keep on punishing her like this ever since that memorable day.

(The end.)



A Slight Service



By Wallace M. Sloane

ONE of our commonest errors is to judge a man by his most spectacular trait. A man may be notoriously advertised as having eaten more hard-boiled eggs than any other man in the world, and only a few of his friends be aware that he is a model husband and honorable in his dealings with others. The character of Dan Tucker, in particular, suffered through this common, human error.

An introduction to Tucker is unnecessary to any one who has ever lived in the boom towns of the South or West. For twenty years "Peaceful Dan," "One-Eyed Dan," or "Dynamite Dan" Tucker—take your choice—was a figure of almost national notoriety. Doubtless many of his feats were exaggerated, but he was a man of prodigious strength and, at times, an utter disregard for human life, even his own.

But that was not all; there was another

side for his friends. He revered established authority, whether in church, law or society, though he had never "jined nothin' excep' the union." Though he could hardly read and write, to him education was a word to conjure with, and he regarded J. C., his thirteen-year-old, book-worm son, with respectful awe. In short, his secret dream was to acquire enough money to establish a spacious home with a great library, dress his wife and children well, and live the conventional life of a gentleman.

"But," he sometimes complained dolefully, "if I ever have any money, somebody 'll have to give it to me."

Wherever he lived, he planned to establish himself as a citizen, and so in the newest boom town he listened to the old-timers and lent an ear to the old legends and traditions. And they were plentiful: the ghosts of old fortunes "lost during the late war"; wraiths of old feuds; unsolved murders of a half-century standing. What

took him by the ears, however, was the tale of buried treasure. He listened to this with more than polite interest, and hastened off to have it confirmed by other tongues.

It was many times confirmed, while Tucker sat spellbound by his own imagination.

An invading army was sweeping into the country when old Anderson Bone, the miser, rode off with his strong box. "I knows it was gold," said old Bates, his utility man, who had lifted the iron box to Bone on his mount; "Lawd a massy, I'd seen it befo'."

Bates was charged under penalty of death not to follow. Nothing was further from Bates's mind; for a time he was almost afraid to turn his head. When he did turn, however, there was nothing to prevent him from seeing, down the hollow and through a vista of trees, his master's mount tied to a great sycamore near the Kelley Springs. The old slave reasoned that the treasure was buried near that place, as a man of Bone's age and infirmities could not carry far an iron box containing fifty thousand dollars in gold. A few yards at most.

Old Anderson Bone did not live through the war, and his faithful old servant has long since gone to a less thankless master. They went, little dreaming the commotion they were leaving behind. Each generation had its fortune hunters, principally among the boys, and not a rock within a half-mile of the Kelley Springs—and there are many—was left unturned. But if the fortune was ever unearthed, the lucky explorer kept his own secret.

Twice it was thought that the treasure had been found. Once, when Henry Skittles, the village bum, bloomed forth as a man of means. Henry toiled not, neither did he spin, and such of his people as were not in the State penitentiary fared worse in the county poorhouse. A heritage, of course, was out of the question. The bubble burst only when he was connected with the post-office robbery up at Trenton.

The sudden affluence of Nim Pogue some eight years later was never explained legally. It was noted that he was the only wit-

ness for the defense in the trial of Colonel Sitkin for murder, and the other evidence was circumstantial. Later Nim left for the colonel's newly acquired ranch in Texas.

In time the buried treasure became a standing joke, with various twists and meanings. If a maid angled for a rich bachelor, she was "exploring the Kelley Springs"; if a miser loosened up for a contribution to the church or a cigar for a friend, he had "found the iron box." The term was likewise applied to the bank cashier when he began to display a thousand-dollar style on a hundred-dollar salary. Impossible undertakings were designated as "hunting for old Anderson's gold."

People rarely searched for the treasure any more. A new crop of boys, sometimes; sometimes a man, under cover of darkness and 'possum-hunting, would casually kick over a stone.

"Now I wonder," thought Dan Tucker; "I wonder—"

Fifty thousand dollars! Why, that was a fortune! With fifty thousand dollars he could buy an estate, dress Maggie and the kids, smother J. C. with books, and live the life of a colonel. Of course he would be done with drinking forever, except maybe an occasional highball for an appetizer.

That night, providing himself with a pick and a gunny-sack, he went to the Kelley Springs. There was something of the child in his make-up, but he was sufficiently matured to fear making a fool of himself. So he kept to the back streets and skirted the woods. He kept Maggie in the dark for another reason: her surprise and pleasure over their sudden wealth would be all the greater.

Slightly off of the old Shell Road north of town were the Kelley Springs, where two hills ran down to meet the valley and left the inevitable hollow between. The springs were once advertised as having marvelous recuperative values, but they were chiefly famed as the spot where old Anderson Bone was last seen with his strong box of gold. It was a rough, lonely spot, with many trees and great, limestone boulders, and even yet, with the houses encroaching nearer and nearer, it would be an ideal place to cache a treasure.

Around the old sycamore to which the miser is said to have tied his horse, Dan began a desultory search. He turned stones and clay roots till after midnight without results, and then went home. Nor was the second night any better. But he was not discouraged: one can afford to exercise patience for fifty thousand dollars.

He had thought the place safe from other intrusions, but when, some time after midnight of his third exploration, he went down to the spring to quench his thirst, a young man was there before him. The young man bore himself with ease and self-possession.

"Dropped by for a drink," he explained. "What you doing—hunting for buried treasures?"

Dan was embarrassed, but he saw no reason for fabrication. Dissimulation always came hard to him. He admitted his folly.

"The thing to do," said the intruder, "is to be systematic and thorough. The trouble with most of you fortune-hunters is that you go about it in a haphazard, desultory manner, if you know what I mean."

"Sure. I hadn't thought of it that away," responded Tucker.

"Well, that's the dope. Good luck, old sport. And remember," he threw back over his shoulder, "perseverance counts."

Tucker, always as good a judge of "quality folks" as a white man's nigger, watched the jaunty stranger admiringly.

"Some rich young gen'man," he thought, "but as friendly an' common as a ol' shoe. He's right; I gotta go about it systematic like an' keep on keepin' on."

Then, beginning with the very next evening, things began to happen—strange, mysterious things which Tucker, in his slow, ponderous way, was never able to fathom. As he was leaving the springs a rock detached itself from a clump of bushes and hurtled itself at his feet. As if to preclude the possibility that it had defied the law of gravity and come of its own volition, it was followed by another.

Instantly Dan thought of the young man of the previous evening. But no, that was impossible; the young man was a gen'man

and his friend. Perhaps it was a crowd of mischievous boys throwing at random, not knowing that he was anywhere near. Anyway, the throwing ceased when Dan called out to "be careful with them there rocks."

But the mysterious occurrences followed him into other nights. On the following evening as he prodded limestone ledges with his pick and explored the fissures of clay roots, he heard some one running in the road. And such running! In the still night air Dan could hear the clickety-clack of feet on the paved road for a mile. Two nights later, at about the same hour and near the same place, there were six pistol shots and the clatter of feet again—this time of many feet.

On Saturday night of that week, Dan was eating a late dinner preparatory to going out on his last search. J. C., with an open book at his side, was cleaning his father's lantern; Rob, the second oldest, was loitering in town as usual. Then, hatless and breathless came Rob, his round, rosy face beaming with excitement.

"A—a man's j-just been k-killed," he stammered. "A-another m-man shot him through the heart."

"Where's your hat?" asked his mother.

Rob did not know; till then he had not missed his hat. He had also omitted to buy a spool of thread for his mother, and could not account for the nickel she had given him with which to make the purchase. Appearances were against the boy; though he disclaimed all knowledge of what became of the money, it was evident that he had spent it on his own voracious appetite.

She was about to punish him for breach of trust and lying when Dan interposed.

"Aw, let the boy alone; here's another nickel. Was either one of 'em blacks, Rob?"

A negative reply. Tucker finished his supper undisturbed. What was one life more or less in a world of change? Still he did not connect the killing with the mysterious occurrences of which he had been a nightly ear-witness near the Kelley Springs. That would have required a degree of thought, and thought, to Dan Tucker, was a burdensome process.

Nevertheless, there was a thread linking these occurrences.

II.

DANNY SHANE had a habit of telling the amusing incidents of the day to Mary Loomis. He did it with such quaint humor, such a touch of exaggeration, that Mary hung on his words as if they came from an oracle. Danny was somewhere north of the cotton line, and was son of the president of the Vulcan Stove Foundry Company. He was twenty-four, older than Mary by four whole years.

They were sitting out in front of Judge Loomis's home, just north of town. The honeysuckle clambering up the porch were in full bloom; thousands of night insects sang in relays in the oak grove. And the moonlight was mildly tempered with darkness.

"Say, what you think?" said Danny. "As I went home from here last night I dropped by the Kelley Springs for a drink, and there was an old man looking for the buried treasure. Had a pick to dig it up with and a gunny-sack to carry it home in. Armed, too, in case anybody tried to rob him."

"That's unusual—a man," said Mary; "it's usually boys. What was he like?"

"Oh, a working man of some kind; a big old fellow. Couldn't see him good. Whoever heard of such foolishness?"

Judge Loomis, who was going out, paused on the steps, fingered his goatee and added his mite to the conversation.

"Yo' fo'tune huntah wasn't a niggah, I'll wageh, an' many of ouh whites wouldn't go neah the place. It's ouh only haunted ground, you know. Something up theah, they say, that runs the dogs off. Even a bulldog that could whip a mountain lion comes back with his tail between his legs.

"You see," he laughed as he walked away, "dogs an' animals in general can see things invisible to mortal eyes."

"Is that the reason," Danny asked Mary, "that you're afraid for me to be out after night? Or do you fear that the old fortune-hunter will rob me and beat me up?"

"Neither, Danny; I can't tell you now. But I wish you'd take a conveyance or come and go sometimes by different routes."

"Pish!"

"What's that, Danny?"

"I said I *wish* you wouldn't try to scare me."

But Mary was not alone in her views on Danny's safety. One day he was accosted on the street by a stranger, who drew him aside and tipped him off to avoid the Kelley Springs neighborhood after night. Evidently the fellow meant to be vague and mysterious, and he achieved his purpose. Refusing to unveil his identity or explain the nature of the danger threatening young Shane, he walked away.

Danny was not frightened off. It was beginning to dawn on him that there might be something to Mary's apprehensions, but it would take something more than the vague warnings of a stranger to keep him away from Mary Loomis. Sometimes he dropped by the springs on his way home. He did not see again the old fortune-hunter with the pick and gunny-sack, and as for weird, uncanny things that took the starch out of bulldogs' tails—rot! Graveyard terrors were for negroes and children.

It was not long, however, till the mystery was explained with a precision and eloquence that mere words could never have attained.

At eleven o'clock he left Judge Loomis's, and a little after eleven, as he was leisurely making his way homeward, a rock or other inelastic object suddenly bumped into the road at his heels. He was opposite the Kelley Springs, but he could not ascribe anything so grossly materialistic as a two-pound rock to the work of ghosts. The huge, grimy fortune-hunter whom he had seen at the springs also loomed for an instant in his mind. But he had little time for reflection, for on the heels of the first rock, and close to his own, came another, then another. Then one whistled in his ear.

Discretion is sometimes the better part of valor, but Danny had no time to think of platitudes. He ran. That is, he ran on level ground and up-hill; going down-hill

and across intervening hollows, he flew. The rocks pursued him to where the houses rubbed elbows down-town. It is well that they stopped there, for he could have run no farther.

The ancient rural sport of "rocking a feller in" may have several objectives. It gives play to the natural exuberance of hoodlumism; again, there is something keenly humorous to the hoodlums' ears in the story that the excited runner usually tells the next day. Its chief merit, however, is that it tends to keep their victim away from certain neighborhoods or households after nightfall.

Dannny did not live up to the rules of the game. He went back, and the nearest reference he ever made to the incident was his cryptic statement to Mary.

"I'd no idea you were so popular, Mary."

He was not attacked that night, but the next evening the fun was repeated with a difference. With eyes and ears alert, as they had been since that other night, he was passing the "danger zone" when he saw a bush move on the side of the road. At the same instant he picked out the knarled oak not twenty paces away behind which he would take refuge.

Then came the first rock. Aimed with deadly precision, it took Danny in the back and it seemed to him as if every rib in his body were broken. They certainly meant business this time. Well, so did he. He did not have to reach for his gun; it was already in his hand. Wheeling, he fired twice in the direction from which the rock had come, and then made for shelter behind the oak.

With gun still smoking he was ducking behind the tree when he saw that it sheltered another man—one of the gang. The gangster dropped his half brick and took to his heels. Twice Danny dug up the dust around his departing footsteps to hurry him along and turned his remaining shots up the road. The gang was now in disordered flight; Danny could hear them go. He reloaded his gun and listened, but all was quiet.

That night a doctor was called in to dress the wounds of one Lem Giles, a young man

about town, who had "accidently shot himself in the leg while cleaning his revolver."

It was merely a flesh wound and not dangerous. After dressing and bandaging it the best he could, the doctor said:

"You'll be as good as ever in a few days. But what worries me is: What kind of a position did you get your gun into to shoot yourself like that?"

"I—I sort o' set down on it, doc," was the best explanation Lem could give.

And still, if Danny was a few minutes late, Mary seemed worried over his safety!

"What's to be afraid of?" said Danny. "Out with it; I'm about fed up on mystery. Forewarned is forearmed, you know."

"It's this, Danny: I hear that a gang is going to rock you in some night."

"Rock me in?" repeated Danny with mock horror.

"You needn't laugh," said Mary; "they don't mean it in fun. Ben Riggs is back of the crowd."

"Ben Riggs? I fail to recall the gentleman among my acquaintances. But why, O lady, do you speak that name in a hushed whisper?"

"Do you mean to say you've never heard of Ben Riggs?"

Danny had not; the name meant no more to him than that of Pharaoh's butler. But he was not long in learning something of Riggs's character, as depicted by Miss Loomis.

Riggs was thoroughly vicious and he covered his felonies with the larger crime of obstructing justice through political influence. Much of his shady work was done by a gang of bullies, but he was not above executing his own orders. Once he had beaten an old man to death on the streets; and men still remember how he once poured kerosene over a great, shaggy dog, which he set on fire and sent down the street, a shrieking arrow of light.

Several times officious persons had evoked the law on him, but to no avail. The district attorney was his cousin, and the Riggses were a large and clannish family of wide, political influence. If some fool grand jury found a bill against him over his cousin's advice, the district attorney promptly *nolle prossed* the indictment.

In passing on to the person of Riggs, Mary dropped from tragedy to light comedy. In appearance he was of short, stout build, rather loudly tailored, with a squat, brown derby and bulging-toed, yellow shoes. His diamonds were the largest in town; his watch-chain was the most massive; his neckwear, the most flamboyant.

"But why," said Danny, "would he want to lead a gang against me?"

"Jealousy," said Mary. "He may not be in the gang himself, but he has a crowd that will do anything for him—anything! Since he can't come here himself, he has determined that no one else shall come. Sets himself up to choose a husband for me, with himself as the other applicant. Till you came it amused me to see him scare the others off; I'd soon become tired of them anyway. But with you—"

"Mary—Mary!" Danny possessed himself of her hand. "If you mean that, Mary, there are not enough Ben Riggses in the world to keep me away from you."

That night he walked home on air, undisturbed in his dream. The gang, in broken conclave, had decided against any further rocking. Twice they had a narrow chance: once when the started to rock Dan Tucker through mistake (thinking him Danny Shane), again, when Danny exchanged lead for stones. Here was one battle that Riggs would have to finish for himself.

On the following evening (Saturday) at seven o'clock, young Shane stepped into a store on Courthouse Street. As he came out he was rudely brushed by a low, heavy man, who was either very drunk or very boorish, or both. Danny apologized and would have passed on, but the heavy man barred his way.

"Fair words don't butter no taters with me," said the stranger.

"You mean you won't accept my apologies, when you were the one that should have apologized?" returned Danny.

Then he noted the stranger's features and habiliments—the squat, brown derby; the flaming cravat; the big-toed, yellow shoes.

"Oh, I know what you want now," he said, and struck with all his might.

A fight was no new thing in "the city" then, but a small group of interested spectators hastily gathered. Riggs was the heavier, but Danny's recent football and gym experiences gave him a slight advantage. The bets, beginning with odds against Danny, shifted to two to one in his favor. He was enjoying the fracas and warming up to the excitement when one of Riggs's henchmen, seeing his man getting the worst of the encounter, struck Danny a powerful blow across the face with a brick.

He fell like a ton of brick. Some one kicked him and a shoe came down heavily on his face—an immemorial custom of the Riggs's gang. He spat out a tooth and suppressed a groan of agony. Then, as the foot descended a second time, he reached for his gun and fired.

Some one fell; he was too dazed to distinguish the victim of his bullet. But he was not kicked again. An instant of silence, then a man cried out hoarsely:

"Not that, you fools; put up your guns. We've got another way."

Danny was only slightly conscious of the excitement he had created. The man he shot fell at the feet of a passing woman, who shrieked and fainted. Policemen ran in from all directions, wielding their clubs and brandishing their guns.

As an example of the half-humorous, half-pathetic incidents that often crowd on the heels of tragedy, a round-faced boy, who had been loitering in town an hour, was entering the store to buy a spool of thread for his mother when the shot was fired. He dropped his nickel on the store steps, and his hat flew off as he ran at break-neck speed homeward.

He was Dan Tucker's Rob.

III.

DANNY'S father and Sam Morgan, the jailer, left him at ten o'clock. He was assured that everything was all right; under the law and evidence in the case, he was justified in killing Ben Riggs. The mayor, one policeman and other reputable citizens had seen the shooting, and they would testify that he had shot in defense of his life.

After the preliminary trial for bond, in which he had nothing to fear, he would be a free man again.

After his company had left, Danny settled himself to look over the evening paper, but his eyes refused to follow the printed lines. Casting the paper aside, he threw himself, fully dressed, on the cot and courted slumber. But there again his mind was a whirlpool of many emotions, and his aching, bandaged face promised little sleep for the night. Ten-thirty—Eleven. Then, as he renounced all hope of slumber, he found himself drifting, sinking into a blissful unconsciousness.

Suddenly he was wide awake. How long he had slept he did not know; possibly an hour. At first he had difficulty in remembering where he was. The moonlight filtering through the iron shackled window illuminated the gray walls with a ghastly radiance. The traffic on the streets had ceased; everything was quiet. Why had he woke so suddenly and completely? He was perfectly at ease in mind and body.

Then he heard voices—low, restrained voices. Rising, he went to the window, and what he saw was enough to strike a chill into his heart. The jailyard was filled with grim, silent men, some of them masked. By straining his ears Danny could make out the masked leader's ultimatum to Sam Morgan:

"Blood or no blood, we'll have him. You've just one minute more to fork over the keys."

Morgan tried to reason, to plead with them for the law to take its course. He had made the mistake, however, of coming outside to argue. Without warning he was seized by two men and the keys to the jail wrenched from him. The next instant six men entered the jail and overpowered and manacled the prisoner.

"Better not follow us," the leader advised Morgan. "We mean business and every man I have will shoot."

The jailer saw them off and ran to call the sheriff. Sheriff Bush was already on the way with the chief of police. They arrived together.

"Which way did they go?" asked Haskett.

"North, chief—up the street." Morgan gave his information in gasps. "Headed for the Kelley Springs, I think."

"How many? Who was the leader?" asked the sheriff.

"Alf Riggs, I think—him or Bernard Colston. He was masked. There was four or five hundred of them. Held me and took my keys—"

"Alf Riggs—and four or five hundred," pondered the sheriff aloud. He was visibly impressed.

"They mean business," volunteered Morgan. "If they're interfered with, somebody—several will be killed to-night."

"They'd probably kill him anyway if they saw we were going to get him," said Haskett. "I couldn't get over fifteen men together, and I'd hate to send any of them to their death."

"Same here," answered the sheriff. "Better one man dead, I say, than a whole park full. Especially when you know they'll kill the prisoner before we get him, anyway."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Give 'em a little time," said the sheriff—to which the chief nodded assent. "We'll send some scouting parties out to the cave and the woods back of the cemetery. That'll take an hour. We'll have done our duty then in the search."

"But they went to the Kelley Springs," harped the excited jailer.

"Sh," hissed sheriff and chief together. "Don't you see?"

Bush deplored the necessity of such a deception, but it was necessary for the benefit of his constituency that he make an ostensible effort to prevent the lynching. It would be folly to send some of his men to their death, to say nothing of incurring the political enmity of the whole Riggs's connection. He concluded, however, that it might be diplomatic to arrive on the scene just after the nefarious work was done. An hour would give plenty of time.

"Explore the cave and the cemetery woods and meet me here in forty minutes, sharp," he commanded. "Then we'll all get together and bear down on Kelley Springs like all hell turned loose. What's wrong with that?"

Nothing was wrong with it, from their viewpoint. The mob planned to have its work done in less than thirty minutes.

IV.

ONCE outside the jail, the mob moved swiftly. Despite Sam Morgan's assertion that there were four or five hundred of them, they actually numbered less than a hundred, but they were grim, silent, determined men and under perfect control of their leader.

To Danny the silence was ponderous, oppressive. If they would only talk—if he could only hear the voices of the six hulking brutes that had him in charge! But only twice was the silence broken: once, when they discussed briefly which road to take; again, when the leader asked one of the mob the time of night.

At the half hour after midnight they arrived at the Kelley Springs and came to a stop near the historic sycamore to which the miser, Anderson Bone, had tied his horse a generation before.

To Danny the scene was too unreal to be terrible. The strangeness of the hour—after midnight; the shadowy eyes peering at him from behind grotesque masks—it was like a fancy ball. He would not have been surprised to wake and find it all a dream. Nor was the illusion of unreality entirely dispelled when the leader addressed him:

"You may wonder why we don't shoot you and be done with it. Well, the crime you committed is punishable in this State by death through hanging. And so you will die to-night, hung by the neck till you are dead.

"You shot one of our men two nights ago and to-day you killed our leader and friend. The laws of the State might turn you loose; that fool policeman and that damfool mayor as good as said so. But we tried you to-night, a jury of twelve men, and convicted you of murder, and now we've come to execute the sentence. Got anything to say for yourself?"

Silence.

"You've no hope for mercy or rescue," pursued the leader. "The officers will only

come in time to cut you down. For us there will be no hereafter; nobody knows—ever will know—who did this work. Anything to say?"

"No."

"All right, boys; tie his legs and fix the noose. And remember, no shooting till the rope has done its work."

The prisoner struggled, but his feet were made fast, the noose slipped around his neck and the other end of the rope thrown over a limb of the tree. He was too dazed to realize fully the situation. He was vaguely conscious of the great trees and the moonlight, ghostly, funereal. The water was trickling noisily from the big spring, and somewhere in the woods a dog was barking.

Still, clutching at a very fragile straw, he hoped that the officers would come in time. Morgan knew of his danger; surely he had given the alarm. But inch by inch the straw drifted beyond his reach. Though he strained his eyes peering into the night, and though he could see half a mile across the valley, not a human form was in sight. Nothing but moonlight and trees and darkened houses.

"Ready?" said the leader. "Then up with him, boys."

And Danny felt himself being lifted from the ground.

V.

THE dog that Danny had heard barking in the woods was not a hunting dog. He was a yard dog that had followed his master into the woods, and while his master amused himself with other pursuits, the dog whiled away the time following the trails of rabbits, chipmunks and other wild game. He was the chattel and companion of Dan Tucker.

Dan was up in the hills looking for the fabled treasure. For two weeks, under cover of darkness, he had instituted a careful, methodical search. But though he had prodded every square foot of the ground and torn up some of the larger boulders with dynamite, he had had no luck. He was of half a mind to quit. He would quit for the night, anyway; it was past midnight and the moon was sinking low.

He came out of the hill above the springs, and there a most unusual sight met his eyes. A large group of men, most of them masked, seemed to be giving their attentions to a young man. He was tied, hand and foot, and the rope circling his neck was passed over the limb of a tree.

Dan Tucker cudgeled his mind for an explanation of these strange proceedings. It could not be a picnic at this time of night. If the young man had been a negro in the place of being a white man and a gen'man, Dan would have understood the situation.

Suddenly he had an illuminating inspiration.

"It's some lodge," he thought, "initiatin' a new member."

Feeling guilty of spying on the rites of a secret fraternal order, he concluded to steal away unobserved. But as he crept into the bushes he saw something that made him pause. The young man's face was bandaged and he further showed signs of rough treatment. And they were actually tightening the rope and lifting him from the ground.

"Lodge or no lodge," Dan thought, "that's no way to initiate a man."

The next instant he had stepped into the open and commanded:

"Stop that!"

"Who the h—" began the leader.

Tucker made no response to the leader's broken sentence. He saw the glint of several guns in the crowd, but a gun was no new sight to Dan Tucker. He walked into the mob, pulled the rope from the limb and stood in front of the intended victim.

"You-all are too rough," he remonstrated. "I ain't got nothin' again' secret orders an' initiations if they don't go too far. But you can see that this boy is sufferin' an's had enough. 'Scuse me for buttin' in not bein' a member, but—"

"Stand back!" Alf Riggs shouted with an oath, waving a revolver menacingly.

Then Dan Tucker began to see that there was more to it than a harmless initiation. He threw on the ground his gunny-sack, in which were several sticks of dynamite he had brought for the purpose of blasting out the larger rocks. Slowly, very slowly, he

began to unlimber his guns—so slowly that they could have riddled him many times over. He went after them as another man would reach for a chew of tobacco. But not a gun was fired; not a hand raised. They watched him, fascinated, horrified; the calm deliberateness of the man held them spellbound. Perhaps they knew that if some one tried to "start something," the guns would come out with lightninglike rapidity, spouting as they came.

Then, as Hal Evarts confessed many years later, the mob found itself looking into the mouths of two cannon. "Not the little old-fashioned kind they used back in the Civil War, but these nine-thousand ton how-is-yers they're using in France now."

"Now, don't let none o' yer guns go off by accident," counseled Dan, "or I'll start such a stampede that you'll trample each other to death. Better drop yo' guns as a preventative."

Then after a moment of silence:

"Better not try to start nothin'," he purred with deceptive gentleness. "I c'd kill twelve of you before I drop if you was to shoot me through the heart, an' I ain't promisin' which twelve it will be. An' then slam this whole caboodle of dynamite into ye. Better git out of my way before I lose patience."

Several men in the rear of the crowd left and there was a perceptible movement in the front ranks to get behind the other fellow. Tucker had the reputation of having killed at least one man in each town in which he had ever lived. As a rule, one was sufficient.

"Hey—there—drop that gun!" he roared, with a quick, convulsive movement toward Alf Riggs. "You too!" he shouted to another.

The crowd had dwindled from the rear to less than half of its original size, and others were leaving. Alf Riggs and his half-dozen masked confederates hated to admit defeat, but they knew that if anything was "started," Tucker's gun would pick them off first. If they could only confer together a minute in private—but all this had come so suddenly, so unexpectedly.

Meanwhile, the sheriff, the chief and squads from the two forces were within

reconnoitering distance. They could not see plainly; all they could distinguish was a group of men around the spring, but they saw no body hanging inert from any of the trees. There was a hitch somewhere and the officers had come too early to avoid trouble. Sheriff and chief drew aside for a whispered consultation.

"Here," demanded Tucker, "who has the key to these here cuffs?" With a slight motion of the gun he motioned the mob-leader forward. The leader's pockets disgorged not only the key but also a pint of yellow whisky. And the gaunt, lank, sinewy superbad-man actually laid aside one of his guns and took a camel's-sized drink.

"Why," queried some one in the rear of his elbow-neighbor, "why don't somebody sometimes call the old bully's bluff?"

"They do," was the answer; one in every town."

The mob had thinned down to a pitiable score. Alf Riggs was not surprised to see that two of his trusted lieutenants had vanished; Alf himself would have felt more at ease elsewhere.

Tucker drained the bottle with a second draft and resumed his other gun. And suddenly his eye assumed an animated expression—such a look as, his friends said, he wore when he began to fancy himself a god.

"I don't want no trouble," he drawled; "I'm a peaceful man—"

"Let's get away from here, Alf," groaned one of the masked figures in a panic of fear. "If that big devil gets drunk, he'll kill the last one of us for the fun of seeing us die. He's got that whole damn bag full of dynamite. He's not human—he's a devil—lead wouldn't hurt him. Why—why, he's over forty years old and ain't dead yet!"

The speaker led the stampede, followed by the others like sheep. Their panic gained momentum as they ran; they interpreted the sounds of their own abnormal heart-beats as the big drunken devil pursuing them with his two cannon. Sheriff Bush and Chief Haskett conferring apart from their men on a little knoll south of the springs, saw them pass and wondered at the cause of their panic.

Tucker turned to his companion.

"Say, if I ain't mistaken, I met you here one night before. You must be the same young gen'man—"

"The same," admitted Danny. I don't know how I can ever repay you—"

"Huh?" said Tucker. "Well, let's go down-town an' see if we can stir up another little drink. What might be yo' name?"

Danny told him.

"Oh, you're the son of the Mr. Shane that owns the stove works where I work?" said Tucker, extending his hand.

"I'm sho' proud to meet you, Mr. Shane. Dan Tucker's my name—'Peaceful Dan' Tucker. If I can ever be of service to you anyway, jes' let me know."

SANCTUARY

BY MAZIE V. CARUTHERS

THERE grass grows tall and trees stand sentinel,
With leaves so interlaced the sun's bright beams
Scarce filter through, the green dusk to dispel,
I keep my dreams.

The voices of the wood, so small and still,
Keep vigil with me for an hour, and when
'Tis time to leave, my dreams bide there until
I come again!

The Last Dance



by Courtenay Savage

IT was to be the last dance of the season, for the house committee had decided it could not keep the club open through the winter. The festivity was really snatched from winter itself, for any day might bring a change from the Indian summer—and, as it was, the decoration committee had had difficulty in finding sufficient branches on which the red and golden leaves remained, so as to fill in between the corn stalks, or to trim around the edges of the pumpkins that lent splashing bits of color to the room.

It was a country dance, the costumes caricaturing the manner in which country folk are supposed to dress. It was the thought of these caricatures that made young Eaton pause after he had tied his formal dress tie, and, carefully surveying the result in the mirror before which he sat, give two or three deft touches to the tie, which he believed heightened the effect of the finished product. Then, rising with a slight effort, he limped across the room and removed his coat and vest from their hanger. He smoothed the soft cuffs of his shirt, brushed an imaginary speck from his trousers, and went to his mother's room to study himself in the long glass.

"Is Isobel going with you?" his mother asked from her place beside the open fire.

"No, she's on some sort of a committee, and she's been at the club all afternoon—staying there with a bunch for supper."

"Oh!" Then, after she read a line: "Be

sure to see that there is a blanket for your knees. It may turn cold, you know."

"Yes, I'm all right."

He was standing very straight now—one did not notice the contracted muscles that caused his lameness. His mother, glancing in the direction of her son, saw his reflection. An odd sensation passed over her. It was almost as if he had not come back. Then, swiftly, joy took its place—joy, because while he might be lame, Andrew Eaton was still tall, very good to look upon, his blue eyes cleanly bright, his light brown hair pushed straight back from his high forehead. And, at the minute, a smile played about his thin, sensitive lips. Yes—she was thankful that he was no worse.

"I thought it was some sort of a dress-up affair?" she questioned.

"So it is, but what's the use of my getting into overalls and a sun hat? I'm only part of the ringside now, you know." There was just a trace of bitterness in his voice.

"Well, you'll have a nice time," she assured him.

"Yes, and even if I'm not dancing they'll notice me in this get-up," he laughed. His mother, a sensible soul, thought how characteristic the remark was of both her son and her husband. They had to be noticed. She was still thinking of the fact when he came in and kissed her good night.

Andrew Eaton was late in arriving at the country club, and, laying aside his fur-lined coat and cap, he arrived at a place in the

main door of the assembly room just as a dance was finished. Standing there, where the couples flooded out into the hall for punch, or seats, he was sure to be seen.

"Hello, Andy!" It was Isobel's greeting. "I've been waiting for you. Been here long?"

"No, just this minute." He would have told her more, but her companion hurried her on. To his surprise she did not seem loath to go. Other couples greeted him, but like Isobel, none of them seemed inclined to linger. Presently he, too, turned and went in the direction of the punch bowl. He was frowning—for it seemed to him that no one had really noticed him.

An unmanly thought? One beneath twenty-five? Possibly, but the idea that he was unnoticed, that he played no part in the life of those about him, had been growing on Andrew Eaton for weeks, possibly months. He did not know when it had started, certainly it must have been as long ago as the summer. And it did more than irritate him—it crushed him, which was dangerous.

Had Andy stood in the ballroom door a year ago, the very music would have stopped. Now? A couple of fellows spoke to him, and a saucy girl, who was his cousin, asked if she resembled the original milk-maid of the nursery rhyme. When he tried to tell her that her costume was perfect, the music started, and she did not wait for his remark.

So Andy went back to the big room. There was a great crowd, but everybody seemed to be dancing. He found a seat in one corner and watched them.

The evening passed slowly. It was not without its moment of petty triumph, for Mrs. St. John Morton, quite the most beautiful woman in the room, and wife of the richest man in Ironport, stopped before him.

"Now, please be a sweet boy and don't get up," she held out a restraining hand, "I only want to say that I've a place for you at my supper table. I spoke to Isobel, but I can see that she's been neglecting you shamefully, and I was afraid that someone else might claim you." She smiled, and went on with her dance.

That was a pleasing attention.

It was not sufficient, however, and it was dulled by the careless way the rest of them spoke—quickly, possibly kindly, and then went on their separate ways. He offered them no blame, not even Isobel. Why should they waste the precious moments of the last dance with him—a cripple?

Once he thought that he would ask Isobel to sit out a dance with him—but that did not seem fair. Had she suggested it, he would have been overjoyed—but—well—who could blame her? He was nothing but a cripple. Many times she led her partner toward him, offered a sunny smile—stayed for a brief minute, and then away. It made Andy think of a mother bird—the way she hovered over him—but what he wanted was a partner, not a protector. But why should she be his partner?

She loved to dance—he knew that from the days when they had danced together—from those dead days when he had dreamed that life would be one long, swaying waltz with Isobel—with an occasional fox-trot to liven the passing years.

And now it was never to be. How could he ask her to love him—a cripple? Andy welcomed the supper hour, for at least about the laden tables he was their equal.

After the meal, however, he went back to his corner. He might have played cards with some of the older people, or possibly hobbled about for a game of pool—it did not pain him to walk, but he must necessarily move slowly. But Andrew was a dance fiend, he loved the rhythmic swaying of the body as it danced—the subtle spell of music was as wine to his brain. Even though he could not dance himself he must be near the others, watching, and thinking.

Such thoughts as they were, too—unpleasant, almost morbid. They were dancing informally now, giving waggish exhibitions which imitated the favorites of the stage, or playing an absurd game of tag—all to music. Occasionally one of the number offered a "fancy step," and there was applause, and a dozen others trying to copy.

Eaton's nose went into the air. He could have danced better than any of them. Almost involuntarily he started—but the sharp sensation which was akin to pain, but not pain itself, stopped him. How foolish

—and how damnable. No, *his* dancing days were over. He relaxed in his chair. Several couples swirled by, but they did not notice him. A foolish train of thought made him think of the quick and the dead, and he was dead.

Dead—how very foolish! Of course, he wasn't dead—but—well, he might as well be. Nobody noticed him any more.

In the center of the floor Isobel was showing Jimmy Ferguson a dance step. Several stopped to watch her. Ferguson was a born dancer—he learned quickly. In a minute he was showing it to the others, he and Isobel. It was a step that she and Andy had danced so many, many times.

Confound it all! Why couldn't he dance? Andy's elbow rested on the arm of his chair, his chin cupped in the palm of one hand. Once, when they stumbled over a step, he started to correct them, but—what was the use? In his dancing days he had been better than any of them, and now—he stirred uneasily. He was young enough, untried enough, to be sorry for himself.

His thoughts, as they often did, traveled back over the years. Once he had had so much to live for, but now there was nothing. To-night, it seemed to him that even Isobel had deserted him. Why shouldn't she? She was having such a good time with Ferguson.

Suddenly he rose, and limped toward the door. At the threshold he stopped. It was not only the dancing that hurt him—it wasn't that Isobel—the Isobel that he had once thought he loved more than all the world, the girl whose picture he had carried into that hell of No Man's Land—did not care—it was just—*everything*!

"Nobody," he said aloud.

The single word startled him. A picture leaped into life and color. In those days he had been a somebody—he *had* counted.

He was a little boy—good-looking, clever, he had attracted them all because he was not too smart, because his mother had taught him to be very polite, and his father that politeness plus husky play never makes a man a sissy. The swiftly changing portrait showed him himself as he had been in the years before college. Then they had

noticed him because he grew tall and very straight, because he was still good-looking, and, because they were all amused to see him at his first club dances—or thrilled with the interest that all country club members know, when they see the cub developing into a crack tennis player, and a golfer that many of the men were forced to admit, was no mean competitor.

Afterward had come college—and more triumph. His parents were not wealthy in the largest sense of the word, but they could keep him provided with plenty of pocket money, and clothes. His father had never suggested that he go to work during the summer, because he was secretly much pleased to have his husky son drive up in the roadster, about four in the afternoon, and demand that he leave the care of the great mill to others, while father and son played golf.

Then, surmounting the other memories, came the fall when he had made the varsity football team. That had been a hometown victory, and they celebrated it royally at the Christmas holidays. And all this while Andy could dance. The music would flood him, and he would float on the floor lightly as a cloud hangs over a valley at sunrise. There was not a woman in the club that would not have given much to have had him for her partner an entire evening, if only because it would have made her the most-talked-of woman in the country club set.

Then had followed the biggest triumph of them all—the war. Andrew Eaton had not been over-enthusiastic about enlisting. He had had so many good times at home every summer—he was rather sorry, but they graduated his class at college a few months ahead of time, and Andy went to the training camp, where he drilled under an almost tropic sun, managed to get enough to eat, and lived only for the Saturday and Sunday rest that came to him as an oasis in a desert of labor.

But it was worth it all when he swung back that Saturday night in August, wearing the bar of a first lieutenant. That was the night they came forward as a body to welcome him, and Isobel would dance with no one but him.

He remembered other nights in khaki, for he was stationed not so far away, and could get home occasionally. Then there was a day when the town told one another that he was across, that his first letter had arrived. It was not visible, but he lived those months because he knew that at home he was constantly in their thoughts.

There was little dancing at the country club that summer, too many of the fellows were gone, and while death was kind to the little band, the icy finger of tragedy had touched. Who would want to dance when the yellow slip from Washington said that Andrew Eaton was missing, or even when the corrected slip said that the first message was incorrect, and that he was alive, but seriously wounded.

They were not days for dancing. Of course, after the letters came that said he was better, that made every one feel better, and the unexpected ending of the conflict was such a joy that everyone did want to dance.

Then the boys began to come home. By early spring so many of them were back that the house committee borrowed enough coal to light two big furnaces, and have a Washington's birthday dance.

That had been the night of nights for Andrew Eaton; memory held no choicer hour. He had arrived in the United States the day before. He had phoned his mother from the pier, and had gone at once to the Base Hospital to which he was assigned.

He was a captain now, more handsome than ever, for the gray look that the pain had left was becoming. On the shell-torn fields of battle he had won the Croix de Guerre—they had pinned it on his coat in the big hall of the hospital.

His mother and father had gone to him at once. There had been scarcely half an hour to get the train, and they had told no one. There was not time. He was fully cured, as good as ever he would be, the surgeon said, and he had been given a ten-day pass. He went home with them the following afternoon.

That night he went to the dance at the country club. Even now he smiled at the memory of how he had slipped unnoticed past the few who hung about the door, and

so to the broad doorway of the assembly room. One of the fellows had noticed him first, and stopped dead in the midst of a waltz step. Two or three couples bumped his partner, but he did not apologize for his action.

"Gee! It's—it's Andy Eaton," he had cried, and propelling the lady of his dance with him, he had made for the door. A dozen echoed his cry. It was Andy Eaton! The colored orchestra, long-standing favorites of the club, forgot to play. The piano leader stood up to catch a glimpse of the fellow who had been the best dancer the club boasted.

That was triumph! Andy's head went higher as he thought of it.

But, triumph-like, it had not lasted. Even the wounded hero loses caste when he discards the khaki and is seen daily. Weeks passed. Eaton had gone his way about the town, had sat as an honored guest on the reviewing stand when they celebrated Welcome Home day—and gradually, so very gradually that it was months before he noticed it, he had fallen; he had suffered the lot of those so aptly classed as "has beens."

It was not a question of self-conceit. Andy was not a cad, but rather having been fed on admiration from babyhood, he missed the mental nourishment as a man misses beefsteak and bread. That was it exactly. He had been the center of attraction, and was no more. On the side line of youth was where he found his place, not in the center of the rushing group that made up the activities of the small city.

Idly he loafed away the days. Even at home he no longer held the place that had once been his, for how could one show great interest in a chap who spent at least two-thirds of his time sitting about the house, the rest of the time at the club, playing cards occasionally, or reading?

Had he been a poor boy he would have been forced to seek occupation, and so profit by the vocational and employment bureau of the local Red Cross. But his father chatted with him, handed over a generous allowance, and was genuinely glad that his boy was no worse. But their great common ground, the golf course, was closed to them. Mr. Eaton played alone.

Andy missed the companionship, but he could see no way to change conditions. The golf games were part of his other life, just as dancing. His mother was still a devoted pal—to an extent, so was Isobel. But how could he ask Isobel to be more than a pal—what right had he? Time was when they were always together, and now days elapsed, and he did not see her or hear from her. Then she would call him up, or find an excuse to stop at his home.

She was sorry for him. She was being kind to him. Possibly she thought that the old bond must hold—no, not that. He decided one dejected afternoon to tell her that she was free. But he lacked the courage actually to speak.

A sudden resolution filled him at the minute. Isobel must be free. She must not consider herself tied down to him because she was sorry. They were all sorry, he knew that, and hated them for it.

Even their sympathy did not help him from being an outcast—a bit of useless timber broken and cast aside by the storm. He turned from his place near the door, and went swiftly out of the door at the end of the corridor. No one barred his way; no one apparently knew that he was going. He closed the door quietly, and slipped lamely down the steps.

A hundred feet across the grass the waters of the lake showed mirrorlike in the cold moonlight. He went to the very edge. His foot touched a stone, he bent down and threw it toward the water. There was a ripple, and then nothing but the path of the moonlight.

That was the way it would be—just a ripple, and then—the silver moonlight. It was so very easy—and yet—would it be wrong? For a short space of time he pondered on the subject. No—it would not be wrong. Why should he stay? It might frighten them all—it might cause pain to his mother, father, and Isobel, perhaps, but—how could he go on?

He stepped closer, it was quite deep there at the edge—deep enough to drown a man who did not struggle. He squared his shoulders. A door slammed, and a name sounded.

“Oh, Andy, I’ve been looking for you.”

Isobel seemed to float across the moonlit grass.

He turned and faced her. “You wanted me?” he said soberly.

“Yes—I missed you suddenly—I wondered where you had gone. You shouldn’t be out here without a coat.”

“It’s no matter.” He shrugged his shoulders.

“It *does* matter, you’ll catch cold,” she smiled at him, and then, seeing for the first time the strange, almost wild light of his eyes, her hand went to his shoulder.

“Andy, what is it? What makes you look like that? Are you cross, because I was dancing, Andy?”

“No.” He shook her from him. It came to him that Isobel would care, after all. “You must go now—you must go back—to the dancing. They’ll miss you.”

“You’re coming with me?” she questioned.

He shook his head.

“Why not? Oh, Andy—don’t—” She started to ask him not to be cross, and then it came to her that it was not with her that he was angry. What was it? A minute they stood in silence. Andy sighed. Suddenly he went down and threw a stone into the lake. A smile of fascination hovered about his lips as the ripples died away.

When the smile vanished, the grimness came back.

Isobel’s eyes searched him keenly.

“Andy,” she breathed, “you—you weren’t going to do that, were you?” Her hand went back on his shoulder.

When he did not answer, she repeated her question.

“I might.” His words were a muffled sob.

“Oh!” It was a wounded cry. “That would be so wrong—you mustn’t, now or ever.”

“Why not?” he flung the question at her. “Why not? It’s my life. Why shouldn’t I?”

“You know—I don’t have to tell you.” He would have turned from her, but she swung him about until he faced her in the moonlight.

“What have I got to live for?” he demanded bitterly, and before he was conscious of what he spoke, the story flooded

forth. He was a nobody—there was nothing for him but death.

It was almost laughable—he was such a cub, but it was the searing finger of tragedy touching Isobel for the first time. The horror of it filled her—Andy, finished with all that life held dear, and finding the way out.

"Oh—but Andy—you still have me—and—and work." Her arms crept about his shoulders, holding him close.

"You?" and then, after a second: "And work?"

"Yes."

"I—I had thought of work. I even went down to New York to see about a place—he's a friend of mine, a broker, but—who wants me, who wants anyone hobbling around?"

"But you have a head and hands." She was slightly exasperated. "You have—so much that most fellows do not have. You could go to your father's mill to-morrow—you belong there. You can train someone else to be your feet—it's the brain that counts, after all."

He did not answer her. It came to him as a sudden ray of sunlight lightens a murky day, that she was right—why hadn't he thought of it before? The mill—why hadn't someone else thought of it? It sounded so very simple, and yet for weeks he had been groping blindly trying to find this simple answer. Of course, it would not be easy, but he could do it—he could sit there behind his desk, and "train someone else to be his feet." It made him think of when he was learning to swim—how the stroke had come to him suddenly after weeks of trying. And he laughed—ever so lightly.

"Don't laugh," she said quickly. "Really—" and then she saw that there was only sudden joy in his countenance.

"I must laugh—it's so wonderful, and so odd—so wonderful that you should tell me, and funny I didn't think of it before—the work—" He stopped, and then in a whisper—"and you."

A little breeze came across the lake. There was winter in its breath—the girl shivered.

"Oh, Isobel, I didn't think—think that you would want me—*now*? Do you—

doesn't this matter? Do you want a man who isn't whole?"

"I—only want you, Andy. I thought that I knew how you felt about your being crippled, and I tried to tell you that it—it didn't matter, but you did not seem to understand. To-night—I tell you again."

She did not say that as he had stood there by the door she had read the despair in his face; that she had known that she would have to tell him in plainer words than ever before. She was a woman, and must have a little secret with herself. Neither did she voice the sudden resolution that filled her—that she would never dance again. He was such a boy, and it had hurt him so to see her dancing as of old, while he must sit apart.

The icy breeze came again.

"I am cold," she said suddenly, "come—they are starting the music for the last dance. Let's go in."

He put his arm about her, and they went slowly back to the clubhouse. There was no word from him—the wonder of it silenced him completely; only the pressure of his fingers told her of the racing joy that filled his veins. For him, it was the silent ecstasy of love.

He did not move his arm as they stood in the doorway and watched the dancing. One did not notice the crippled leg—he was so tall and handsome, and the girl's bright frock, the pink of her cheeks, the soft hair, were in such striking contrast to his most somber clothing.

The last dance! They were all dancing, the floor filled with rhythmic swaying as the subtle strains of the waltz crept into their veins. They would never dance together, those two in the doorway, but their hearts kept time to the waltz strains of "Mighty Lak a Rose." Perhaps there was something prophetic in the music—"sweetest lil' fellow"—something that might be a consummation of their love.

Her face flushed, and looking down at her, he saw the droop of her lashes across her cheek, the quiver of her mouth. He longed to be alone with her, to take her into his arms, and say that she had given him back himself. His eyes must have mirrored his thoughts.

It was Mrs. Morton who noticed them first, and read the meaning of the light that bloomed about them. She smiled, and whispered a word to her husband. He looked, and smiled, too. And then it seemed as if they all saw the two in the doorway. No one stopped dancing—they

could not afford to miss one step of the last dance of the season, but their eyes were ever toward the doorway.

Andy Eaton was once more the center of attraction—"somebody."

For the first time in his life, he did not care.



THE house was thronged; it was the huge and mosque-like auditorium of a mid-western city, and this was its opening night. The throng was there, not to hear a young, famous, old-world violinist, but to be, in their hearty, breezy, western fashion, part of the show.

There were brokers, clerks, teachers, music students, modest house-holders, mingling for to-night with Society; the glare of lights, the confusion of seating, a high, interminable buzzing, the over-heated air, produced a sort of intoxication of excitement that passed for pleasure.

High up in the balcony, a starved music student, his head in the clouds, began to gasp for breath—floor and ceiling rushed together—he was between the upper and the nether millstone. Poor fellow! He was destined never again to create such commotion as he now effected by the simple act of fainting. It was growing very late; the audience became good-naturedly impatient; there arose a great uproar of applause.

Meanwhile behind the curtain the artist's manager was wringing his hands. He had been wringing them for over an hour with-

out effect. The young virtuoso, who by now should have been receiving the plaudits of that vast company beyond the footlights, was nowhere in evidence. He had not been in evidence since early that afternoon; an elevator boy at the hotel had been the last to see him.

The boy had by now reiterated his information so many times to the manager, the hotel proprietor, the proprietor's wife, the theatrical producer, the various agents sent out in search, as to feel himself in a position of huge importance.

His story was to the effect that he had taken the violinist, wearing his customary black, soft hat and cloak, and carrying a fiddle-case, down to the first floor in the elevator. To this story he added nothing, and from it he took nothing away. An elevator has its limitations.

The applause beyond grew more insistent; the latest messenger had returned without news. The restaurants and cafés had been combed, and every conceivable public building visited and revisited in turn. The producer threw out his hands; a towel and basin could have carried no more trenchant meaning. The manager gave a final

frenzied wringing to his tortured fingers, and went before the curtain. Between the wings and the stage he effected a quick change—his manner became suave, tinged with a natural concern.

"Ladies and gentlemen—I am sorry to be under the necessity of announcing to you that owing to the sudden indisposition of M. — the concert scheduled for to-night cannot take place. I need not say how much I deplore the unavoidable disappointment. Your tickets may be redeemed at the box-office."

A great gasp of consternation went over the house; and yet many of them had already got what they had come for. The starved music student, now sufficiently recovered to make his way out with the rest, recklessly squandered a dime at a lunch-wagon for a cup of coffee and a bun. Ambition began boring again in his brain like a maggot.

Toward dusk of the same evening, a lowering, blowy dusk after an angry sunset, a solitary pedestrian, tramping stolidly along, his head almost concealed beneath a great felt hat, his loose cloak blowing backward like a mantle, a fiddle-case hugged under his arm, made pause in the midst of the flat, dull country where at intervals many shed-like buildings, huddled together within broken-fenced enclosures giving upon bare reaches of stubble and black, cloddy ground, denoted one and another of the many little farms of that country.

By now the traveler was cold, tired and hungry; he had walked off the first fine enthusiasm of freedom. Hours before, scarcely realizing his purpose, he had left behind the irritating noise, confusion, and confinement of the city, and the ugly magnificence of his hotel, for the solitary expanse of the open country, taking with him but one companion—his fiddle.

He approached one and another of the little dwellings where seemed curiously no sign of life. Once a lighted pane invited him—it was but a last reflection of the dying light. But a little farther on, of a sudden through a thick clump of trees, he caught a shining—a sudden, wavering efful-

gence like moonlight through trees; and when he had come out into the open, he saw that there were many others here before him.

To trees and fences everywhere were hitched teams and smartly-saddled horses; gusts of merriment blew out through a suddenly-opened door, and across the windows passed and repassed many figures.

To the stranger in a strange land, it was as if suddenly he had come again home—home to that little Bohemian village of his birth—where on certain festive nights the neighbors were wont to congregate—young men and maidens, grandsires and granddames; many children; dogs, too—carts and horses.

His eager nostrils caught the scent of boiling coffee—hot, thick, sweet—his memory was drenched with it; he snapped his teeth down as he thought of the little, frosted cakes. He approached the door which at that moment opened to permit the egress of a stalwart young farmer. The folds of a great, flowered comforter spitting cotton spilled down from his arms—he was about to blanket his horse.

"Hello!" exclaimed the young farmer, at sight of the stranger; he retreated a little, staring; the door stood open, a flurry of snow blew in, the lights flared and faces crowded round.

The stranger pulled off his wide hat, leaving an undulating cap of dark, curling hair exposed; his brows, curiously straight as if they had been drawn by rule, his eyes like bright slits in a shutter, his full and curving lips—the whole contour of his face—had an odd and foreign look.

"He's got a fiddle!" cried one.

"A fiddle! A fiddle!" ran round the group in the doorway; there were others peering over their shoulders.

"What's all the pother?" sounded a new voice. Old Jake Merriweather who was host, strode forward. He was in his shirt sleeves of faded butternut-yellow flannel, but his appearance was unwontedly heightened by reason of the wide silk tie he wore.

"Who sent ye?" he demanded, doubtfully; "Willy Kibbey's been a-tunin' this half hour!"

A chorus of protests arose. Willy Kibbey

was available the year round. Here was a promise of new tunes and all the glamor of the unexpected.

Willy Kibbey himself craned forward, lank, lean, and round-shouldered, mutely fingering his strings; his fingers were gnarled from the farm work. He gazed hospitably upon the stranger as one of his ilk. "Come on in!" he invited; "We can spell each other."

Thus adjured, the other entered, the company falling back in a sort of rude circle about the room. It was a roughly ceiled and plastered room, now quite empty for the dance, lighted by coal-oil lamps whose chimneys were already beginning to be smudged. A sort of rude platform had been erected at the farther end for the fiddler. In a room beyond could be seen a long table covered with platters of meat and plates of frosted cakes; a fragrant steam hung over this room like thin hazy fog.

The stranger flung off his cloak and tossed his wide black hat beside it; he opened his fiddle-case, withdrawing a padded silk bag, drab, fringed with wear, and stiff with rosin. From the mouth of the bag he drew the fiddle; the light that glinted along its back was like a pool for depth and clearness, but red—a sort of glassy red; but the top bore black stains and blotches with ragged edges curiously like dried blood.

His bow was alive; it passed like a flame along the strings. At first there came a sigh—then it lashed out like a noise of wind in branches. The cunning hollow shell responded, and rocked with the storm; of a sudden there was calm—and then a queer and most unheard-of thing transpired—his nimble fingers were doing a tight-rope dance upon the strings. Shouts of delight went up; they began to form for the set.

Suddenly the fiddler made an eager protest—he turned to the host with a pathetic request rather by sign than words: "Food!"

They brought him sweet, hot, steaming coffee, hunks of bread, the white meat of chicken, and plied him with little frosted cakes. He ate unabashed, taking great,

devouring mouthfuls, washing them down with black draughts of coffee; his breath was like a sweet, hot draft. Suddenly he left off, dabbled his fingers in his glass of water, rubbed them vigorously on a fine kerchief, took up his fiddle, tightened his bow, caressed them with lingering, pliant fingers and waited for the caller.

In any company, wherever gathered, whatever the occasion, there are always those to whom it is allotted by reason of some natural endowment to be its leading spirits. To-night was no exception. Lena Merriweather, daughter of the host, was a great strapping, buxom girl—a blowsy blonde, handsome in her big red-and-white way—the way that never lasts beyond youth.

She had many beaus, but no declared lover; there was lacking in her some indefinable element of girlhood—the fragile, inviolable veil of maidenly reserve. Now she stood laughing up into the face of Bruce Hammond, the young farmer who had discovered the fiddler on the door-step. When she laughed she showed her white teeth and the curving pink of her gums.

He had no eyes for her. Seated at a little distance in the crowded space against the wall was his girl—a greater contrast to the handsome Lena could not have been imagined. Lois Parrish was small, slight and dark. There was no color about her—even her dress was sombre—the careful economy of a thrifty mind. Yet if one observed closely, she had more than color—a sort of shining quality; her smooth hair shone, and her quiet eyes; her skin was of so fine and smooth a texture as to possess a satin-like sheen.

She sat there, crowded into her little space, looking quietly on. It was as if amid the confusion, the rude, bucolic laughter, the jesting and horseplay, she had found a little quiet post with a clear field of observation.

It was this shining girl who held the handsome Bruce in thrall. His eyes wandered back to her even as Lena laughed up at him, her eyes crinkling into little, laughing slits. Her young brother Cyril limped by, carrying a rude instrument which he and Ezry, the hired man, had constructed

after the manner of a fiddle. It had a whisper like a dried corn shuck.

His mother, a mournful, horse-face woman whose skin had the gray and porous look of pumice, working busily over the loaded table, called him back and surreptitiously crowded an especially fine frosted cake into his hand.

Cyril was fifteen, but his infirmity had kept him younger than his years; other boys of his age were fast becoming bashful beaus. Cyril was still and probably would always be only a little boy.

The impatient fiddler suddenly lifting his violin aloft, came down with his bow arm upon a shivering chord across four strings. The fiddle gleamed as red as blood—a queer, murky red; the very lights flared up brighter; where they stood they began to dance; the girls' faces were like stars and roses.

Bruce Hammond had caught Lena about the waist. Before to-night he had never cast a glance in her direction. Her very body seemed to swell and glow with a sort of effulgence—she might have stepped from a history book of queens—red-tressed queens, like Elizabeth or Mary of Scots; her hair sprang up like live flames; a fine pink ran under her skin like sap; the cotton stuff of her dress, very full and light, blew out with the motion—it had a flowered design, and the flowers seemed to bloom upon it and the vines to sway, and with the blowing of its folds there seemed to pass a waft of perfume.

A strange spell possessed the dancers. They were at that period of youth when the world seems to have been created just as it stands, without past or future—a transcendent present.

The fiddler sat looking all about with his queer narrow eyes like slits in a shutter; and the faster he played, the wilder grew the dance and the redder seemed to gleam the murky red of the fiddle; the stroke of the bow was like queer lightnings playing the most extraordinary sensations into their heels and spines.

The women had left their tasks in the kitchen and crowded about the door. There was magic in the room beyond the threshold. Girls who had been plain,

flashing past the door left a triumphant glance of beauty; their heavy feet, shod in coarse leather, that clumped heavily about the household tasks, now had the lightness and fleetness of small wild things of the wood. There was a riotous swirl of color; their breath began to come faster and pantingly.

In it all, three took no part. Ezry, the Merriweathers' hired man, following one of the dancers with the speaking eyes of an old dog; Cyril the crippled boy, who had drawn close to the fiddler and watched him with a sort of fascination; and Lois.

By now all of the shining had gone out of her. It was as if that strange magic that had transmuted what was base in them to gold, had stolen her radiance and left something dull and tarnished in its place. She might have been a shadow cast against the wall.

Still watching through his narrow shuttered eyes, the fiddler prolonged a note of unearthly reach and sweetness. The dancers stood poised motionless. The note trembled like a quivering breath, held, grew in intensity, and then shivered downward through the vast space like a rain of stars into the deep well of his golden G.

But in that moment of suspense a strange thing had happened. Poised motionless as they were, the dancers yet had an effect of falling back a little, leaving the center of the room to two central figures. A peculiar and murky light seemed to envelop them, for by now the flame of the wicks had been drawn upward, licking the sides of the smudged chimneys with little scarlet tongues.

These two had stopped with the rest, and there was about them an odd and sculpturesque effect as of two heroic figures arrested in mid-flight. The light centered on their faces—on his that might have been a head done in bronze—on hers, with its close and rippling cap of hair, the full columnar throat, the bold contour of feature, like speaking marble.

His arm encircled her; she strained backward; there was both lure and calculation in the posture; her full, bold eyes were fixed on his, where a somber blaze was beginning to be kindled.

With a sudden fierce and mastering movement he drew her to him; his grasp on her waste tightened; his great hand cupped the knotted hair on her neck; and he drew the gleaming, irradiated face where a strange light seemed to palpitate ever nearer to his own. Their lips met and clung.

Bruce lifted his eyes and gazed out with a sort of reckless triumph, and Lena's bright head lolled back.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a hoarse and animal-like cry: In an even greater amazement the guests watched a shambling, bent, ungainly figure stumble forward, uttering the while in a sort of frenzied monotone: "No—no—no—I say—mine—mine—"

It was Ezry, the Merriweathers' hired man. He had reached the two and was now tearing with a sort of nervous strength at the arms that encircled Lena's body.

Bruce Hammond's mouth widened into an amazed grin; a great laugh came roaring up from his throat. Lena's eyes crinkled into cruel slits out of which a light of scorn and ridicule poured.

And now before their eyes, the shambling, loose-hung, pathetic figure, whose head habitually hung forward from his shoulders as from beneath a yoke, suddenly reared itself to an unimagined height; the head sprang up; the eyes—those patient, following eyes of an old dog, became torches; the hands that commonly fumbled over the mending of fences and machinery, struck out fiercely with an unwanted tool. There arose a sudden startled cry.

"Look out—he's got something there—My God!"

Bruce's mouth, a great red open circle, of a sudden hung loose; his eyes fell dully upon a spreading and sodden spot upon his shirt; his great body began to waver downward.

Ezry stood staring stupidly at an old, broken-bladed knife with which he was accustomed to peel off kindlings for the kitchen fire. It dripped; and he threw it down in a sort of timid disgust. All the spirit had gone out of him. He stood cowering and whimpering in a sort of mongrel whine until some one led him away.

Lena had got pasty. Her cheeks sagged; the great, untidy twist of her hair like a wrung mop dragged over her shoulders. Where was all that brave look of queens? Here was only a clumsy girl with thick calves in white cotton stockings, a striped petticoat, and a gown so faded that the flowers printed upon it seemed to have withered.

Someone took command; a space was cleared; the blood staunched, and a doctor summoned; and in the waiting, huddled into groups, they suddenly remembered the fiddler.

He had vanished. The enshrouding cloak, the shadowy hat, the fiddle-case—all had disappeared. They recalled the fiddle—its amazing and ruddy color—its black, clotted stains—That sinister color took on a vague, unspoken significance. They remembered the shivering sound of the fiddle; the cunning wooden shell that had seemed to house a very breath of life—whose urge they had blindly obeyed—seemed now to their superstitious fancy to have drawn its power from a more than human source.

They called to mind how the lights had flared, how the coarse attire of the girls had seemed to take on the sheen and glamor of fine fabrics, and the stars and roses that had been their faces. And there was the spell that had overtaken Bruce and Lena, that had betrayed Lois, and transformed, for his little moment, the silent Ezry.

And the cloaked fiddler—whence had he come? Whither had he gone? They had opened, to find him on the door-step, but his going was less than the passing of a shadow. There were those who boldly affirmed that there was hell magic in it.

Bruce was removed to a room of the Merriweathers, and Lena nursed him. He was destined never fully to recover from this strange thrust; the slightest cold or exposure thereafter brought with it a return of the old pain; and from that time he seemed to be afflicted with a vague, rheumatic turn.

He thought of Lois, but he could not ask to see her; and she never came. The Merriweathers did well by Bruce; and when he was sufficiently recovered, he and Lena

were married. The young folks continued to remain with Lena's parents, and Ezry, silent, unkempt, and shambling as before, stayed on. Curiously enough, Bruce never bore him any grudge for his disaster; there was even an odd sort of camaraderie between them—pawns in a strange game of fate.

Lois continued to live quietly at home, and on occasion, when there was a meeting in the little country church, sitting over against the window in the stiff wooden pew, she seemed to Bruce to be a shining part of the window, like some little human saint.

That winter Cyril, the crippled son of the Merriweathers ran away. He had got some queer notion of fiddling himself, having received the feeble but conscientious instruction of Willy Kibbey. It was always believed that Mrs. Merriweather, who had never been able to refuse their crippled boy anything, found means to supply him with money. He was gone a long time; long enough to have his little exultant day of hope, and his long enduring night of disillusionment.

One day he came back—the best fiddler in the country-side—better even than Willy Kibbey. But in the beginning this had not been his goal.

It seemed to him that the place looked more ramshackle than he remembered it, owing partly, doubtless, to careless and casual additions. The household seemed little changed; but Lena had grown very fat; her great, swollen face had an empurpled look about the cheeks; Bruce had become stooped, in an unconscious attempt to spare his injured shoulder. Cyril helped eagerly; but his mother continued to spare him. In the evenings he played his fiddle—but nothing changed as on that former night—their was no charm to restore Lena's old beauty, nor Bruce's strength. Finally they would all go off to bed, leaving him there alone.

One day he went up to Lois's little hill farm. It was hers now—her parents were dead. She rented the land, but the house she would always live in. It was like a shining casket for the exquisite housing of the small, shining jewel that was her person. There was about her and about her surroundings the trace of an infinite fine

patience of perfection. A cold and gleaming sense of order streamed out from the little entry.

Lois was in her afternoon dress of rigorously polished gray percale, with a snowy apron, whose edge looked more like the carved lace of marble than mere knitted thread. A little, round, black onyx pin with a pearl in the center which Cyril remembered her mother to have worn, reminded him oddly of Lois's face—pearl-like amid the shining blackness of her lustrous hair.

"I am glad to see you, Cyril," said Lois in her precise way; "I have never seen you since—" A queer, indefinable change came over her face; it looked curiously duller.

"I know," said Cyril. "It would have gone hard with him, Lois, if it hadn't been for you—when you hurried him out, while they were all gaping at Bruce on the floor there—and I untied the horse—what were you thinking of, Lois?"

"I was thinking there had been harm enough done," said Lois.

"The horse wandered back next day," mused Cyril. "They said it had devil's marks on its flanks—Lois—you never held to that old superstition—"

"A fiddle is a strange thing," said Lois. "It seems to possess one. See how it drove you, Cyril?"

"Mine is only a chimney-corner fiddle," said Cyril, a little sadly. "It only chirps at night like a cricket in the wall, Lois—wouldn't you like to hear my cricket some day?"

Lois smiled slowly. She looked at Cyril, whose elder she was by scarcely three years. There would always be something of the dreamer about Cyril, and a sort of shy, in-born gentleness. His clothes showed a shabby, pathetic care; the hard twill of the goods had taken on the shining look of age.

Lois looked down into the transparent recesses of her mind as into a crystal, and she saw what might well come to pass. The red fiddle had enticed away one lover, but might not Cyril's cricket bring into her house a quiet, sober, and enduring affection? She said gently: "Yes." For them at least, the spell of the Red Fiddle was forever broken.



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